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AN ARTIST'S LOVE STORY

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*Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A.
From the painting by himself*

AN ARTIST'S LOVE STORY

TOLD IN THE LETTERS OF
SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE
MRS. SIDDONS AND
HER DAUGHTERS

EDITED BY
OSWALD G. KNAPP, M.A.

WITH PORTRAITS AND FACSIMILES

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P R E F A C E

THE correspondence printed in the following pages, and now for the first time given to the public, is derived from two collections of letters, written between the years 1797 and 1803, and preserved by two intimate friends and correspondents of the Siddons family.

The one in the possession of the Editor consists of the letters written by Mrs. Siddons, her daughter Sally, and Sir Thomas Lawrence, to Mrs. Pennington, with copies of some of the latter's replies. These, with a few exceptions, are given in full.

The other comprises the letters of the sisters Sally and Maria Siddons, with a few from their mother, to Miss Bird. Its existence was unknown to the Editor until the former collection had been prepared for the press, and was actually in the printer's hands; but by the kindness of the owner, Miss Grazebrook of Hagley Court all that was material in it has been incorporated in the present volume, so far as the necessary limits of space would permit.

The letters have been allowed, as far as possible, to tell their own story, with the addition only of so much introductory matter as seemed necessary to explain the situation and the relations of the writers to one another, and of brief notices of the persons

incidentally mentioned in the correspondence. The original phraseology and spelling have everywhere been preserved, save in a few instances where there was an obvious slip in grammar or orthography.

The extracts from the letters of Mrs. Piozzi are all, unless otherwise stated, from her unpublished correspondence with Mrs. Pennington in the Editor's possession. For the portions of the lives of Mrs. Siddons and Sir Thomas Lawrence which lie outside the period of the letters, the chief printed authorities have been consulted, and are acknowledged where quoted. The Editor has also to express his indebtedness to the indispensable "Dictionary of National Biography" for many dates and details, relating both to the principal and minor personages mentioned, too numerous to be separately acknowledged.

The illustrations have been selected, as far as possible, from portraits by Lawrence himself. The Photogravure of Mrs. Siddons is from the original oil painting in the National Gallery. The reproductions of Lane's series of Lithographic "Imitations of Sir Thomas Lawrence's Chalk Drawings," published in 1830, are from a set in the Editor's possession. For the remainder he has to thank the authorities in the Print Department of the British Museum, who kindly granted permission to photograph impressions in their portfolios.

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AN ARTIST'S LOVE STORY

AMONG the men who moved in the artistic circles of a hundred years ago, there can have been few figures so striking and attractive as that of the young artist, destined, a few years later, to become, as Sir Thomas Lawrence, the President of the Royal Academy. Those who knew him best agree in representing him, altogether apart from his professional reputation, as an extraordinarily accomplished and most fascinating man.

In youth his features were so beautiful that his master, the artist Hoare, said that if he had to choose a head for a picture of Christ he should select Lawrence's; and though the quality of its beauty could not but change with advancing years, his face remained eminently handsome and pleasing in later life. His figure and carriage were graceful, as would be expected in the case of an accomplished dancer and fencer. He was one of the best amateur billiard players in England, though he abandoned the cue, as it was commonly reported, on being warned by a friendly Academician that this accomplishment, if talked of, would be a bar to his professional success. He was, moreover, an excellent violinist and singer, an admirable reciter of blank verse, and, on public occasions, a polished speaker, while his manners and

deportment were such as to earn the approbation of no less a personage than the "First Gentleman in Europe," who pronounced him "a high-bred gentleman."

The wonder excited by such a catalogue of accomplishments, natural or acquired, is not lessened when one recalls the circumstances of Lawrence's birth and early years. Born and bred in an inn; with little or no schooling, save as a child at Bristol, and, later on, some instruction in French and Latin from a Dissenting minister at Devizes; called upon to contribute to the support of his family by his pencil while yet in his teens, he can have had but little opportunity for general culture or professional training. His father, who was by turns attorney's clerk, actor, publican, exciseman, and showman—and who failed alike in each capacity—though eccentric in dress and habits, is said to have been a man of good manners, with a great love for the poetry of Milton and Shakespeare, which may account for some of his son's literary proclivities; but perhaps, as is often the case with genius, more of Lawrence's talents may have been derived from his mother, of whom, however, but little is recorded.

But it does not fall within the scope of these pages to undertake an investigation into the origins of his varied accomplishments—we are only concerned with the impression they made on the minds of his friends and acquaintances, male and female, particularly the latter. For it is certain that those gifts of body and mind which extorted the admiration of the friends of his own sex, won for him, in

more than one case, a much warmer feeling from those of the other. For them, indeed, the slight tinge of melancholy which was habitual to him made his handsome face all the more interesting. Their self-respect was flattered by a specially deferential and sympathetic manner; while he possessed in an unusual degree the attractive but dangerous power of conveying the impression that his interest was wholly concentrated in the person with whom he was, for the moment, brought into contact. With all this in his favour it is not surprising that he should have been almost irresistible when he chose to exert his powers of fascination. And of these, in truth, even up to the end of his life, he was never chary; so that he has been stigmatised by some of his biographers, and not without some show of reason, as an "old flirt."

This phrase, however, seems hardly just as applied to Lawrence. There was no calculated or conscious "playing at love" on his part, a fact which, perhaps, rendered him all the more dangerous to the fair objects of his admiration. His artistic and emotional nature, easily moved by a lovely face or cultivated intellect, and always open to receive fresh impressions, was, for the time being, wholly devoted to the cult of each successive divinity at whose shrine he worshipped; and he no doubt believed himself genuinely in love with each in turn. This view is by no means incompatible with the somewhat theatrical manner in which he habitually gave expression to his emotions under these circumstances, nor is it necessarily contradicted by the fact that after all he died a bachelor—

a fitting nemesis, it may be, for such a character as his. In the case of two, at any rate, of his fair charmers, he was sufficiently in earnest to make a formal offer of marriage, which is, perhaps, a better evidence of devotion than his threats of suicide when he feared rejection. The objects of his grand passion were the lovely but ill-fated daughters of an equally lovely and more talented mother, the great actress Mrs. Siddons, with whom Lawrence had been on terms of intimacy from his youth, and whom he always continued to regard with reverence and affection.

The true story of this disastrous double-courtship and double-desertion has never yet been told, and consequently the character of Lawrence has, in some quarters, suffered more than his conduct altogether deserved. It has even been suggested that he was responsible for the death of one or both the girls who were so deeply attached to him; but, whatever mental suffering his inconstancy may have inflicted on them, he must be cleared at any rate of this charge on the testimony of Mrs. Siddons herself. On the other hand, he has been excused as merely the innocent object of an unrequited passion—at any rate in the one case; or sympathy has been demanded for him as being the more to be pitied of the two—a view which, as it will be seen, is even farther from the truth than the other. At the outset all the details of the tragedy were known (if we except the three chief actors in it) only to one other person besides Mrs. Siddons herself. Even her husband and brother were kept in the dark till the last act was reached, and the rest

of the family seem never to have been fully taken into their confidence. Contemporary gossip made guesses, more or less wide of the mark, and biographers have, for the most part, passed lightly over a subject on which they had no accurate information, or feared to wound the feelings of the living by disclosing too freely the failings of the dead. The fullest account is to be found in Fanny Kemble's "Records of a Girlhood"; but even she, who, as the daughter of Charles Kemble, and therefore the cousin of the unfortunate girls, had the best opportunity of learning the facts, was clearly in error in several particulars. For it happens that a correspondence between the chief actors in this strange drama and the one friend who shared their secret, has survived; which, being written while it was still proceeding, not only gives an account of it at its most tragic moment, but incidentally serves to test the correctness of other versions of the events which preceded it. It was preserved by this friend, in the first instance, as she tells us, for her own justification in case of a possible scandal which she had at the time good reason to anticipate. This danger soon passed away, but the letters were still kept with a view to publication when the susceptibilities of the living could no longer be hurt by the disclosure of the truth, and for this purpose they were left by her to her most intimate friend and correspondent. On the death of Mrs. Siddons the question of their publication was mooted, but dropped, apparently on the ground that there were still some who might be pained by their disclosure. The lapse of a century since they were penned,

and the publication of a version of the story, as mentioned above (copied in a recent life of Mrs. Siddons), removes this objection, and the whole correspondence will be found in the following pages.

By a strange coincidence another correspondence has been preserved relating to the same story, and covering nearly the same period. This was carried on by the two girls, almost up to the time of their respective deaths, with a friend of their own age, who was also intimately connected with the Lawrence family, and to whom they unbosomed themselves even more freely than to their mother's friend. The bulk of this, so far as it throws any light on the story, is also, by the courtesy of its owner, incorporated into the present volume.

There is no need to swell it with details of the career of either the great actress or the popular artist—lives of both are numerous and easily accessible; but for the right understanding of the situation at the date when the letters begin, it may be well to give an outline of the connection which existed between them, and of Lawrence's relations to her two elder daughters.

Mrs. Siddons' acquaintance with the artist was one of long standing, and dated from the time when he was still an infant phenomenon, brought into the parlour of his father's hostelry to amuse the passing guests by reciting poetry or drawing their portraits. This he was doing at the age of six, when he achieved a likeness of Lord Kenyon which his wife declared was the best ever taken of him. By the time he was ten years old he could turn out heads,



MRS. SIDDONS
AS ZARA
1783

Daines Barrington tells us, usually good likenesses, in about seven minutes, and was an excellent reciter of blank verse. The date at which he first attracted the notice of the great actress is unknown, but a portrait of her is extant, drawn by him when he was only thirteen years of age, and when Mrs. Siddons had just secured her position on the London stage; and at least two others of her, in the characters of Zara and Aspasia, were executed at the same period. Her patronage and recommendation, as well as that of her brother, John Kemble, whom he drew in every possible attitude and character, were doubtless of great service to the young artist in the earlier stages of his career; and when, in 1787, he established himself in a London studio, he would naturally be admitted to her house on terms of intimate friendship. Lawrence, who had at one time strong leanings towards the stage as a profession, had an unbounded admiration for the talents and character which had taken the town by storm; while Mrs. Siddons felt for him an affectionate regard, which, in spite of all the anxiety and suffering his impetuous and unstable character caused her, only ceased with her death.

Her family at this period consisted of two sons, Henry and George (boys of about thirteen and two years old respectively), and two daughters, Sarah Martha (usually known as Sally), born in 1775, and Maria, born in 1779, and consequently about eight years old. Two other children were afterwards born, of whom the one died in infancy, while the other, Cecilia, was the only one of the children, except George, who survived their mother. Sally

and Maria were taken by their parents in 1790 to a boarding-school at Calais. When they returned from the Continent two or three years later, "finished," and ready to shine on their own account in the social firmament of which their mother was a "bright, particular star," Lawrence, too, was fairly launched on his brilliant career. He had already obtained Court patronage; and though too young for election to the Royal Academy, he had been made a Supplementary Associate—an honour almost, if not quite, unique. He must have met the two girls frequently, as soon as they were permitted to appear in Society, as well as at their own home, on terms of intimacy, and their charms soon wrought havoc in a heart ever susceptible to impressions of female beauty. Of Sally, Campbell writes that "she was not strictly beautiful, but her countenance was like her mother's, with brilliant eyes, and a remarkable mixture of frankness and sweetness in her physiognomy," while her talents as a musician probably appealed to another side of Lawrence's artistic nature. Maria is said to have been more beautiful than her mother, or at least as beautiful as Mrs. Siddons might have been if freed from family cares and professional anxieties. Opinions, however, differed as to the comparative beauty of the two sisters. Mrs. Piozzi, for instance, writes, 23rd May 1793, "We were at the Ranelagh two nights ago, and staid till morning. Mrs. Greatheed and the young Siddonses with us. Sally quite outlooked her sister by-the-by, and was very finely dressed." And again, in a letter dated June 16, the same year, "The dear Siddons left me

yesterday ; she has charming daughters now, so have I, so we can see but little of each other. Sally is exceedingly well, and just as pretty as every pretty girl of the same age, and prettier than Maria, because her face looks cleaner." It may be, however, that Mrs. Piozzi was not just then an impartial judge. Sally had been staying with her, and helping to nurse her youngest daughter, Cecilia, through an alarming, though, as it proved, not dangerous illness ; and so she writes, October 3, 1792 : "Of Sally Siddons I say, like as Imogen says of Pisanio, 'Thou'rt all the comfort the gods will diet me with ;'"¹ and again, with a gush of grateful affection, "Sally Siddons is my darling daughter."

But both sisters were constitutionally delicate, and, soon after their return from the Continent, showed symptoms of lung troubles which, developing differently in the two cases, ultimately proved fatal to both. Mrs. Piozzi—with whom, as mentioned above, Sally was staying in 1792—writing to a friend, on September 9, about her own daughter Cecilia, who had shown what it was feared were symptoms of consumption, says, "She must have asses' milk now, instead of Sally Siddons, who grows fat and merry." But within a week she has to record a sharp, though short, attack of sickness ; and a month later, as she was accompanying Mrs. Piozzi to pay a visit to her friends the Greatheeds at Guy's Cliffe, she was seized with a bad attack of what was evidently spasmodic asthma ; a disease which clung to her through life, and brought her to

¹ "Cymbeline," iii. 4.

an untimely grave. Mrs. Piozzi gives an account of her illness in her own lively style, in a letter dated Guy's Cliffe, October 14. "On the road hither . . . Sally Siddons was taken *illish*; I hoped it was the influenza, for cold she could not have catch'd, and I have kept her at all possible distance from my own girl ever since she threw up blood at Denbigh. Here, however, was she seized yesterday with such a paroxysm of asthma, cough, spasm, *anything*, as you nor I ever saw her attacked by. . . . She is in a state I know not how bad, but, as God never leaves one deserted, here most providentially was found Mr. Richard Greatheed, who, you know, practised physick for many years in the W. Indies, and under his care we are now existing, not living. . . . Sally in her bed desires to be remembered to you, who have so often watched her bedside. She has reason to adore Mrs. Greatheed though, who ransacks the country for relief to the dear creature, and we expect her mother every minute, to add to our agony." The friend to whom this was written was destined ere long to watch by the dying bed of the other sister. At this period, however, nothing serious was apprehended in either case. It is likely that Maria's delicacy only increased her beauty, and Sally's spirits, in the intervals of her illness, were all the higher when she emerged from her sick chamber after her brief attacks.

At what period Lawrence's friendship for the two girls began to give place to a warmer feeling for one of them we do not know precisely; but as it must have been when Maria was still a girl of

about sixteen, while Sally was between three and four years older, it was almost inevitable that the latter should prove the more attractive. Nor can we say exactly how far his intentions were carried; but it is clear that Sally was perfectly conscious of his rising affection, and was not slow to reciprocate it. But that he could have gone so far as to make, at this time, a formal proposal for her hand, as stated by Fanny Kemble in her "Records," is, in the light of what followed, highly improbable, if not altogether impossible. Such a step could not have been taken without a reference to Mr. Siddons; and it can be inferred, almost with certainty, from the letters which follow, that he was totally ignorant of such an attachment. It is natural, however, to suppose that his courtship must have had the tacit approval of Mrs. Siddons, who was fully aware of his feelings, and had a sincere regard for the young artist, for whom she rightly augured a successful and brilliant career. For a while it appeared as if the course of true love were, for once, destined to run smoothly, but ere long it was threatened with disaster from a most unexpected quarter. While Sally's charms were stationary, Maria's had been rapidly developing, and Lawrence began to find her image occupying his mind more and more to the exclusion of her sister's, till at length the conviction was forced upon him that he had been too precipitate in his choice, and that his future happiness depended on his being able to extricate himself at once from an untenable position.

How he succeeded in accomplishing this, and,

what is still stranger, how he contrived to secure his recognition in the new rôle of Maria's lover, without bringing about a breach between the sisters or a rupture with their mother, can only be conjectured. But, for the reasons given below, it does not seem probable that any stormy scene took place between himself and Mrs. Siddons, such as is narrated by Fanny Kemble. It is much more likely that Sally (whose judgment was sounder and whose feelings were more under control than those of her sister), finding that Lawrence's devotion was growing cool, and that Maria's affections were deeply engaged, allowed him to transfer his allegiance without protest, and thus Lawrence entered on the second stage of his chequered courtship, and made, in due course, a formal proposal for the hand of Maria.

But though the latter seems to have felt no scruples about accepting her sister's magnanimous act of self-renunciation, her mother's consent was not so easily gained. Maria was still very young and inexperienced; her constitutional delicacy had already given her mother much anxiety, and an early marriage appeared altogether undesirable for her. Moreover, much as Mrs. Siddons admired the artist's character, she had grave doubts whether it was one which was at all calculated to ensure her daughter's permanent happiness; and Lawrence, though he already stood high in popular favour, and was in receipt of good commissions, had the burden of supporting his parents upon his shoulders; while his own want of method and inveterate habit

of anticipating his income kept him involved in continuous monetary difficulties which hampered him through life. For some time, owing to her parents' disapproval, the courtship was carried on under considerable difficulties, chiefly by means of private notes and clandestine meetings at Lawrence's studio in Greek Street, in the arranging of which their common friend, Miss Bird, then on a visit to the Lawrences, seems to have actively assisted. Thus Maria writes, in a letter undated, but evidently written about the end of the year 1797 :—

MY DEAR MISS BIRD,—I don't know though whether I will call you *dear* because I am very angry with you, to say you did not partake my smiles, you know you did, and that “you look'd so grave I thought I must have offended you in the morning.” No, it was you who was grave and sparing of your smiles, and you know it as well as I do ; indeed it never happens that at any time I am indifferent to people I love. I *hope* you love me, and yet sometimes I am very much inclined to think it is quite the contrary. *Causes* I do not pretend to guess at ; indeed I told Sally you look'd *cross* at me last night, as cross as your sweet countenance will let you look ; but you are conscious of this, and, I daresay, resolve not to do it again. I'm very glad you lik'd me in black ; I did not see myself before I went out, for I came home so late that I went to my room directly, and would not ring for Candles that they might fancy I had been in a *great while*. I *felt* how to dress myself, absolutely, and came down about the middle of

dinner, and my Father ask'd me where I had been ! I told a *story*, and there was an end of it. Sally is getting better, I hope ; she has been very ill, and is still very weak. She desires her kindest love to you, and thanks you for your letter ; she begs you will come the first day you can, and she will thank you herself ; you know *I* am always delighted to see you, and you are *sometimes pleas'd to see me*, are you almost always ? You see I have not bought the rul'd paper yet. Give my love to Miss Lawrence. I gave exactly the same account of the play last night as you did, but you did not seem enough shock'd and pleas'd with the Ghost of Evelina, perhaps you are not a coward though. Adieu, my dear Miss Bird, believe me ever truly and *unalterably* yours,

M. S.

The Ghost was doubtless the one who walked for the first time on December 14, 1797, and for sixty nights afterwards, in "The Castle Spectre" of "Monk" Lewis, who is noticed later on in the letters.

About the same time she writes, evidently in the hopes of a similar interview :—

MY DEAR MISS BIRD AND MISS LAWRENCE,—
To-morrow morning we intend calling on you between twelve and one, if it does not rain, if you are not otherwise engag'd I mean. Are the Lady's clothes wash'd, etc. ? Because I will dress her if they are. You will deliver the enclos'd note for me, I daresay. Adieu till to-morrow morning.

Don't let my *Uncle Charles* in; it looks quite ridiculous to write *Uncle*, I think, and believe how sincerely I am yours,

Maria Sedgwick

Apparently a little later she writes to Miss Lawrence :—

“I am very sorry I shall not see your brother before he goes. Tell *Mr. Tom* he shall hear from me to-morrow morning, because my mother don't like to bear a letter.” This was no doubt conveyed by Miss Bird, to whom she writes, “Will you deliver my letter to Mr. Lawrence? I know it will be a pleasing task to you.” The replies were usually received through the same channel, for Sally, also writing to Miss Bird, remarks that Maria “begins to be vex'd and impatient that, tho' it is near four o'clock, no note makes its appearance from Greek Street.”

In the course of this winter Maria's health began to be seriously affected, and her parents, attributing her illness in part to mental anxiety, and fearing the scandal of an elopement or clandestine marriage if they held out too long, yielded to their daughter's entreaties, and gave their consent to a formal engagement. The question of settlements was, his Biographer says, discussed; Lawrence was to be relieved by his father-in-law of all his pecuniary difficulties, and all that remained was to fix a date for the marriage. Sally accordingly hastens to give

Miss Bird, who had returned to Warwickshire, an account of Maria's condition and prospects.

LONDON, *January 5th*, '98.

I have heard, my dear Miss Bird, that you are safely arriv'd at Rugby, and I heard of your departure from Charles, who told me he had seen you set off. And here I was interrupted, most agreeably, by your kind letter, which I have just read. You see it was not necessary to remind me of my promise, tho' I forgive you that, and so I will, as often as you send me such nice letters. But I'm sure you are impatient to hear how Maria is, and so I will defer all I have got to say till I have given you an account of her health. She is, dear girl, to all appearance, very much better, but Dr. Pierson does not say so; he seems entirely to rely on her pulse, and that goes (or at least did yesterday) at the same galloping rate that it has done for this week past. He says she is in a *very* doubtful state, and has given us too plainly to understand that a Consumption may be the consequence. I cannot however see her so very much recover'd without great hopes that her youth, and the unremitting attention that is paid her, may conquer this complaint. Do not for Heaven's sake breathe a syllable of this which may reach Mr. Lawrence's ears, for I suppose, if he could imagine her so seriously ill, he would be almost distracted, now especially, when every desire of his heart is, without opposition, so near being accomplished. For now, dear Miss Bird, I must tell you a piece of good news, which will I know surprise and please you; my Father at

length consents to the marriage, and Mr. Lawrence has been receiv'd by him in the most cordial manner as his future son-in-law. Maria determin'd to speak to my Father when she was much worse than she is now ; she did, and he, mov'd by the state in which she was, and considering, no doubt, that the union must take place with or without his consent, thought it most wise to agree to what was inevitable. Some letters pass'd between him and Mr. L., and now all is going on smoothly, and he regularly makes us a visit every evening. Should not this happy event have more effect than all the medicines? At least I cannot but think it will add greatly to their efficacy. But what will our friend do without some difficulties to overcome? But perhaps in this pursuit he has found enough to satisfy him, and will be content to receive Maria, tho' there now remain no obstacles. Well, I rejoice sincerely that there is an end to all mystery, and I think Maria has as fair a prospect of happiness as any mortal can desire.

I shall call Charles to an account for not delivering your last kind remembrances to me ; people are too apt to forget those kind of messages, which are always pleasing, and sometimes of importance. *I* shall not forget the compliments you charge me with, so, when I see *one* of our friends, I may say he is not forgotten, *if I please, and think proper*. Oh yes, I think it very proper to console him for the flight of his sweet Bird, and I certainly will. But tell me, dear girl, and tell me truly, to which of the Charles's shall I chiefly address my consolations, to which of them shall I indeed say how much Greek Street is regretted, and how dull the country

appears? But you are a sly thing and won't tell me a word of the matter. Some one particular thing, I am convinc'd, is the cause of your regret, for it is not a gay London life you lament the loss of, you did not lead such a one. Our society (though I feel certain you were happy in it, because I judge by myself,) was so provokingly interrupted that you had not enough of it to make that so heavy a loss. You see I have guess'd the cause of these regrets, tho' I cannot fix upon the object. . . .

Of the two namesakes mentioned in the preceeding letter the former Charles was evidently her uncle, the youngest son of Roger Kemble, who was born the same year as Sally herself, a fact which accounts for the apparent lack of respect in the way in which he is mentioned by his nieces. He had been engaged at Drury Lane in 1794, and was now beginning to be entrusted with more important parts there. The other Charles was a Barrister, a younger brother of General Sir John Moore, the hero of Corunna. In spite of Sally's subsequent disclaimers, there is no doubt that he felt a sincere and lasting affection for her, though he hardly permitted it to be guessed even by its object, and only a chance circumstance, the sight of her bust, revealed it after her death.

Three weeks later, Sally writes to Miss Bird, giving a fairly cheerful account of her sister.

SUNDAY, *January 28th*, '98.

I should not have suffer'd your last letter to remain so long unanswer'd, my dear Miss Bird,

but that I waited to send you news of Maria's return to the Drawing Room, where she has now been for several days, and is recovering her strength and good looks every day. But here she must remain, Dr. Pierson says, during the cold weather, which means, I suppose, all the Winter, and the Thermometer still hangs up to direct the degree of heat. But surely if ever confinement was supportable, it must be to Maria, for she not only sees all our friends and acquaintance as usual, but the visits of her *first friend* are unremitted, and should (should they not?) console her for everything.

I saw a friend of yours the other day, one Mr. Charles Moore; we had a long conversation about a pretty and amiable girl who has lately left London for the country, and he told me he envied me extremely the happiness of corresponding with her, and lamented that *propriety* did not permit him to write. The other Charles too, to whom I deliver'd your message, desir'd me to speak of him when next I wrote. Mr. Lawrence, who was here this morning, saw me writing, and, when I told him who my letter was to, he beg'd me to give his *respectful duty*. I said I thought it was an odd message, but as I observ'd to him, I suppose you know what it means.

A pretty parade truly, my very sincere friend, you make of your sincerity, and then tell me *the Charles's share your regard and esteem*, well, I can only repeat you are a sly thing. And what do you do in the country? Anything that has, or that is likely to console you for your departure from London? Miss Lawrence seems quite satisfied,

nay, delighted, with her change of situation. I fear my dear namesake will send me word she has much ado to be *satisfied*, and leaves *delight* quite out of the question.

Since Maria has been so much better, and has had so agreeable a companion, I have been out to amuse *myself* two or three times. I have at last seen the Castle Spectre, and was delighted quite beyond expression when the Spectre did appear, but what a deal of dulness one has to wade thro' before she comes! And how ridiculous some of Mrs. Jordan's attempts at the pathetic are! I could really scarcely forbear laughing outright two or three times. I was at Drury Lane too, the first night of Blue Beard; some of the Music is charming, and the scene where Sister Anne (as she was call'd in the old story) appears on the Tower, is capitally manag'd, and interesting to an excess, the pleasure of which is almost painful. I was delighted at that part of the piece, and very angry at, and very much tir'd with much of it; they have not told the story by any means well.

Tell me, dear Miss Bird, if you sing often, and if my songs continue to be favourites; I'm sure, if you sing them, you will gain me, as well as yourself, a great deal of credit, so don't discard them for my sake.

And now, having reach'd the end of the third page, I will finish my letter. Write to me soon, and believe me ever yours, with sincere esteem and affection,

S. SIDDONS.



MISS (MARIA) SIDDONS

1797

It is probable that Sally's opinion of Mrs. Jordan, who took the part of Angela in "The Castle Spectre," was coloured somewhat by jealousy for her mother, for it was generally admitted that the former was as supreme in Comedy as the latter in Tragedy. "Blue Beard" is notable for its early concession to realism in the introduction of live horses on the stage. As it first appeared in 1797, it was a Comic Opera by Sedaine, with music by Grétry, but was soon afterwards adapted by the younger Colman for Drury Lane.

For a month or so all was sunshine, but Maria's next letter suggests that a cloud was already arising to dim her new-found happiness.

LONDON, *Feb.* 16th [1798].

You would certainly have heard from me before, my dear Miss Bird, but you never requested it you know, and I never lik'd to write, as I was uncertain whether you wish'd it. Now I daresay you are angry with me for saying this, and indeed I do not mean it. I hope you still remember that you promis'd to love me, though I fancy Sally has her share and mine too. I am a great deal better than I was, and I may be very thankful I am here at all. My illness has not, I am told, alter'd my person, except making me a little fatter, but it has left a depression on my spirits which, I fear, I shall not easily shake off : if my letter should be a little dull, that must be my excuse. My Mother and Sally are gone to Covent Garden to see a new Comedy, and the famous Joan of Arc, and Dorothy Place is sitting with me ; her company is very delightful to

me in my confinement, it has been a very long one, and I am anxious to go out of the house for air, but I must not till April! I agree with you that nothing can be so delightful as the *unremitting* attention of those we love, but where shall we find constancy enough in this wicked world to make us always happy! My dear girl, I sincerely wish you may, and yet I hardly dare hope it for you. How grave I am; do I not tire you, and will you wish for another letter? I can only tell you how much I have lamented your leaving London, and that I love you as much as ever. I'm sure you will be glad to hear this, but alas! I have no other (I will not call it *news*) for you: I hear none, and I never stir out. I am very glad Miss Lawrence is so much better, give my love to her, pray. And so you are very gay, and visit a great deal. I hope your pretty *head* is admir'd, I know your pretty face must. I wish you were here that I might again try to make it prettier than it is, a *very arduous task*. You were always so good to me as to admire my suits, and I wish I may not be grown vain, though now I never hear of *my beauty* or *my suits*. I am here all day, and very seldom see anybody so kind, yet I do not wish it. There [are] more real delights at home than I thought there were, the love of a mother and a sister never fails; did we but know when we were happy how many sorrows should we escape. Have you ever experienced any real sorrow? Yes, I know you have though, but you seem happy now. I hope Sally tells you some news in her letters. I shall see Mr. Charles Moore here on Monday, and I shall talk to him about you;

I'm sure he cannot have ceas'd *mourning for you!* I daresay you have put even Miss Amelia Locke out of his mind. And now, dear Miss Bird, I must make an end of my letter. I am not in very good spirits, it is the effect of my disorder, and I know you will not think my letter so very dull as I myself do; the next, *if you desire another*, will be more like myself, and I hope and *believe* it then will please you more. Dorothy desires to be remember'd very kindly to you, and I daresay if Mr. Lawrence was here he would desire his respectful compliments; you know very well that it is not easy for a common acquaintance to forget you, and cannot suppose it possible an old friend can, unless they are *very* inconstant indeed. Be assur'd *everybody* in Great Marlbro' Street thinks of you often. I daresay our friend Mr. Cowen too regrets you, or *your purse*. Write to me very soon, dear Miss Bird, and believe how sincerely I am yours,

MARIA SIDDONS.

Amelia Locke, who was now supposed to be the object of Mr. Moore's devotion, as she was afterwards of Lawrence's, was the daughter of an art amateur who resided near Mickleham in Surrey. Not long afterwards, as mentioned in Sally's letters, she married John Angerstein, M.P.

Before the next letter was written the threatened storm had burst. No better account of it could probably be given than that which appears in Fanny Kemble's "Records of a Girlhood," if only we are allowed to transpose the names of the sisters as there recorded. Lawrence had become, she says, "deeply dejected, moody, restless, and

evidently extremely and unaccountably wretched. Violent scenes of the most painful emotion, of which the cause was inexplicable and incomprehensible, took place between himself and Mrs. Siddons, to whom he finally, in a paroxysm of self-abandoned misery, confessed that he had mistaken his feelings, . . . and ended by imploring permission to transfer his affections from one to the other sister." How this second extraordinary volte-face was accomplished, for accomplished it undoubtedly was, the authoress of the "Records" does not profess to know. But one of Mrs. Siddons' letters which follows lifts the veil a little, and we can see her, for the moment, unable to cope with the difficulties of the situation, lacking the moral courage to reveal it to her husband or brother, and at length, in spite of her better judgment, yielding a reluctant consent, wrung from her by Lawrence's violent behaviour and threats of suicide if his desire was not instantly granted. The scandal which she dreaded was thus averted, but she was doomed to pay a heavy price for her momentary weakness.

It is true that the stormy scene with Mrs. Siddons, quoted above, is said by Fanny Kemble to have taken place when Lawrence deserted Sally for Maria; but this is almost certainly a misapprehension. The previous engagement to Sally which it implies is not corroborated by the letters, though they do show that some such scene must have occurred at this period of the story. That a man of Lawrence's temperament should fall in love with two sisters in succession, or even with both at

once, is conceivable. What is not conceivable is that Mrs. Siddons (who must be presumed to have given her consent to the supposed first engagement to Sally), should twice condone the desertion of a daughter, and twice allow herself to be half frightened, half cajoled into assenting to a new engagement, and yet, while freely criticising Lawrence's past behaviour in her letters, give no hint of two such occurrences. Moreover, as an engagement to Sally could not have been acknowledged till Mr. Siddons' consent was obtained, so it could not have been cancelled without his knowledge; yet the letters show that he was ignorant of everything but the engagement to Maria. This confusion is easily accounted for by the fact that Fanny Kemble does not seem to have been aware of the jilting of Maria, and the artist's renewed courtship of Sally while her sister was on her death-bed. These circumstances, as it will be seen, Mrs. Siddons carefully concealed even from her nearest relatives, and thus a scene, otherwise correctly described, may have come to be transferred to a wrong point in the story.

Sally gives the following guarded account of the startling change to Miss Bird, suppressing, for obvious reasons, her own share in the catastrophe.

LONDON, *March 5th*, '98.

I fear, my dear Miss Bird, you have accus'd me in your heart of ingratitude and much neglect, for having suffer'd your kind letter to remain so long unanswer'd. Believe me it is not that I have felt no inclination to write, far from it. I was at

first prevented by indisposition, and since by circumstances that have indeed almost entirely engross'd my thoughts, and which have made me neglect almost everything else. If you could guess these circumstances, how would you be amaz'd, and yet, perhaps, you would not, for you seem to be well aware of the mutability of *men and things*. A great, great change has taken place in our house ; when you write to Maria avoid, if possible, mentioning Mr. Lawrence, at least for the present ; all that affair is *at an end*. Are you astonish'd ? Had you been present for some weeks past you would not be so much surpris'd. Maria bears her disappointment as I would have her, in short, like a person *whose heart could never have been deeply engag'd*. Mr. Lawrence has found that he was mistaken in her character, his behaviour has been evidently alter'd towards her, as I told you, for weeks ; his letters too, she said, were as chang'd,—in short, we see him no more. I long to be with you that I might tell you *all* and *everything*, for I'm sure you are much interested in this affair, but I cannot write half I would say. It is now near a fortnight since this complete breaking off, and Maria is in good spirits, talks and thinks of dress, and company, and beauty, as usual. Is this not fortunate ? Had she *lov'd him*, I think this event would almost have broken her heart ; I rejoice that she did not. You will say nothing of all this when you write to her, perhaps she may herself tell you of what has happen'd.

We are become quite gay, I assure you, for as Maria cannot go out, we try to make her confinement

as pleasant as possible, and therefore have frequent parties of an evening. Dorothy Place is spending some time with us, she is a sweet girl, and a cheerful companion. I have not been out scarcely these six weeks, of course Maria keeps us much at home, but this week I shall be very gay, I am going to no less than three parties, but one of them I shall, if possible, decline. I think I need not tell you that I take no great delight in these sort of visits ; nobody enjoys *society* more than I do, nobody has less delight in *company*.

The Charles's were here last night, and desir'd me to remember them particularly to you when I wrote. What a merry creature Mr. Charles Moore is, I think I never saw any one laugh so heartily in my life ; it is impossible not to join him, even tho' one is ignorant of the cause of his mirth. You see by the Papers that my Mother has begun to play again ; she was a good deal fatigued after the Play on Saturday night, and was very indifferent all day yesterday, but she has comforted me this morning by saying she feels much better. I am writing to you before breakfast ; Maria is not yet up, or I should be charg'd with her love and thanks for your nice letter. Adieu, dear Namesake, keep the balance even in which you weigh your love for me and Maria, for if it leans ever so little to her side I should be jealous. Pray write to me, I hope you have not the excuses I have had for silence : believe me ever yours with true esteem and affection,

S. M. SIDDONS.

The situation at this, the final period of the artist's eventful courtship, was more complicated and embarrassing than ever. Sally, whose heart had always been given to Lawrence, however strongly her self-respect and sisterly affection may have prompted her to repress its workings, could not but experience some feelings of triumph at the return of her old lover to his allegiance, even while her head must have warned her how small was the worth of such fickle devotion. Mrs. Siddons still loved the man for his many good qualities, though she had seen enough of the weaker and baser side of his character to make her shrink from the idea of accepting him as a son-in-law: while she could not but be bitterly conscious of the false position in which her momentary weakness, and still more, her concealment of the fact, had placed her. Lawrence, too, was farther than ever from realising the happiness he had doubtless anticipated. Whatever Sally's inclinations may have been, she had too much good sense and self-respect to throw herself unreservedly into his arms, and refused to commit herself to any promise, at any rate for the present. And he was above all anxious to keep on good terms with the girl he had so deeply injured, who might, if she were so disposed, interpose a serious bar to his hopes of winning her sister; though indeed he does not seem to have realised that she had any just ground of complaint against him. Poor Maria's position was necessarily the most trying of all. Resentment against her faithless lover was, naturally, the predominant feeling in her mind.

She could hardly be expected to view with complacency the resumption of her sister's former relations with the man who had just deserted her, or submissively accept, as Lawrence seems to have expected, the rôle of a sister in place of that of a wife.

Maria thus unburdens her heart to Miss Bird in a letter dated March 14, 1798.

You were desirous of another letter, my dear Miss Bird, and I should have told you how much pleasure yours gave me before this, but I have been quite ill again, and not able to write; even now I feel a sad pain in my side, but I must write to you. A relapse is always worse than the original illness, and I yet think I shall not live a long while, it is perhaps merely nerveous, but I sometimes feel as if I should not, and I see nothing very shocking in the idea; I can have no great fears, and I may be sav'd from much misery. I fear never creature was less calculated to bear it than I am, and in my short life I have known enough to be sick to death of it. You know I suppose the cause of too much of this misery, therefore I shall be spar'd the hateful task of mentioning it. Yet from the love I have for you I cannot bear that you should think I have been in the wrong, ah no, indeed, he himself, if it is possible any feeling can remain in him, will acknowledge how little he deserv'd the sacrifices I was willing to make for him. But I have determin'd to be silent on the subject, nor can I wish to prejudice the mind of so great a friend against him. I know you will be sorry to hear how ill I have been, and how nerveous I still

continue, though I am again mending. I look forward with impatience to the time when I shall be myself again, and now I will endeavour to shake off this oppression, and entertain you a little better. I saw your favourite Mr. Charles Moore here on Sunday evening; we had a great deal of company that evening, and among them was pretty Miss Ogilvie, looking very well indeed. The party was so large that it a little tir'd me, but I was reviv'd by being assur'd I look'd not at all like an invalid, but as well as ever I did in my life. How deceitful one's looks sometimes are then, for I was far from being well or in good spirits. Mr. C. Moore is very much entertain'd with Dorothy's natural manner, and laughs in such *peals* it quite frightens the lookers on, for fear he should go into fits. He is a very pleasant creature indeed, and seems always in equal good humour. My mother and Sally are gone this morning to Greenwich; I long so much to go out that I envy every poor little *beggar* running about in the open air. This confinement becomes insupportable to me, it seems to me that on these beautiful sun-shine days all nature is reviv'd, but not me: for it makes me regret the more that I may not enjoy the air, who have so much need of it to cheer me after such an illness. How delightful the country must be now, do you walk a great deal? I wish I was of your party. I expect to go to a very beautiful place this summer, Clifton, but I look forward to it with no pleasure; for the first time I shall be separated from Sally and my mother both, they go to Scotland, which will be too

cold an air for me to venture in. I shall, I believe, be with a Lady at Clifton, where, if I can keep up my spirits, I am more likely to get well than in any other place in England. Were you ever there? It is a lovely place, and I never was more delighted in my life than I was the first time I ever saw that walk there is between the rocks; a river runs through it, and when we were there it was evening, and there was one late boat coming home, and music in it. I shall be delighted to wander there, but the idea of not having Sally with me to enjoy it, will, I fear, put all my *romantic ideas* out of my head, and hinder me from being pleas'd a moment. There are balls there twice a week, public breakfasts, etc. You may enjoy the beauties of nature there whenever you like, and yet be very gay in the evening, for the balls are generally crowded. I am glad to hear Mrs. Bloxam has got safely over that frightful affair and is so well again. I have now written a great deal more than I ought, dear Miss Bird, so I must, with reluctance, say adieu. Don't be so formal, pray, as to wait a *proper* time to answer my letter, but write soon and often, and be assur'd they will always be receiv'd with great pleasure by me. Sally desires me to tell you she expected a letter too. Believe me always, dear Miss Bird, yours affectionately,

MARIA SIDDONS.

A fortnight later Sally writes to excuse the reticence of her last letter, and wondering whether Miss Lawrence "is not thunderstruck at this determination of her brother's." She is enjoying the

frequent visits of Mr. C. Moore, who "is as chearful and entertaining as ever. I see him appear with pleasure, I think he is very agreeable company, and I see him depart without regret. Don't you think this is the comfortable way of going on? Oh, if I had always done so, I should have been happier than I am. Write to me soon," she adds, "and tel me that this necessary reserve on my part has not made you angry. I told you all which was to be told in my last letter. It is very certain they were not suited to each other, but had he lov'd her, he would not have found those deficiencies in her character which now he has discover'd."

Maria's next letter is in rather a more cheerful strain.

SUNDAY, *April the 8th*, '98.

I hope my dear Miss Bird did not imagine, because I have not told her so, that her letter did not give me pleasure. Indeed it did, and I wish'd to write, but I have again been very ill, bleeding and blistering again! But I will not dwell on such a melancholy subject, but follow your advice, and endeavour to get the better of it all. I make great exertions, and I hope I succeed. I am almost recover'd now, and if nothing throws me back, I hope I shall soon be able to go out; it appears to me that I should be *very like* myself if I could but take a walk, and feel the wind blow on me again. I am indeed doubly unhappy, whenever I cannot keep up my spirits, to see I hurt my Mother and Sally. I am angry with myself, though I am conscious of struggling against it:

oh how I long for the Summer! I am still, I believe, to go to Clifton, and I have a very faint hope that dear Sally will be with me. I shall ride and walk all the morning, but I don't feel as if I should wish to go to the Balls, what a beautiful part of the evening one loses in Summer! And I believe I have lost my love for an Assembly for a long while. You have heard, I daresay, of this new Tragedy of The Stranger, it is the most affecting thing, I'm told, that was ever seen, even men *sob* aloud. I wish very much to see it, is it not strange one should like to cry? as if there was not enough of it in reality. Sally went, and she never was so affected before, she says. I see you are jealous of Dorothy, but you need not [be], she is a favourite, and so are you, you know. Mr. Moore will never, I am persuaded, be really *in love*; so do not be uneasy, you will, I daresay, put us all out of his head, if you will but come; I wish there was any hope of it, have you ever thought of the plan you mention'd to us? A great many people in London have had inflammation in their eyes, I hope yours is quite gone. Mr. Windham was here last night, and really he frighten'd me out of my wits about the French. He says they will certainly come and kill us all, *or worse*; I never heard anything so dreadful as his accounts of their intentions, and he says they will be here in six weeks perhaps, you, I daresay, are not so much alarm'd, at a distance from London, as we are. Have I not written you a stupid letter? Indeed, it is a great exertion. I hate writing lately, but I shall always be delighted

to read your letters when you will send them me, and perhaps some time I may be rous'd from this low, stupid way, and be able to entertain you better. Sally says she expected to hear from you before this, and only sends her love to you on condition of your writing her a long letter. If Miss Lawrence is with you, pray remember us to her. Adieu, dear Miss Bird, write very soon, you waited longer than was *proper* the last time. I hope you are convinc'd you were mistaken in your conjectures about me. No, I am not angry at your supposition, you did not know the state of my heart. Believe how sincerely I am yours,

M. SIDDONS.

Charles, *our Uncle*, is here, and desires I would give you his *love*, not his compliments, *oh, very well!*

I wrote the beginning, indeed almost the whole of this letter yesterday, this is so lovely a one that even I revive in it: if it will but continue I shall get quite well. I will hope while the sun shines, and after a great deal of sickness and sorrow, how pleasant it is to feel one can hope still! Adieu again, dear Miss *Sally Bird*, as I hear you call'd, though I think it very disrespectful of the young men, and I assure you even the *Miss* is omitted.

Though no estrangement seems, even now, to have occurred between the two sisters, it was manifestly desirable that Maria should, for a time at least, have an entire change of scene. The state of her health, too, provided an additional reason for sending her away from London. Campbell

quotes a letter written by Mrs. Siddons to her old friend Tate Wilkinson, May 29, 1798, which shows how anxious she had become on that score. "The illness of my second daughter has deranged all schemes of pleasure as well as profit. Thank God she is better, but the nature of her constitution is such that it will be long ere we can reasonably banish the fear of an approaching consumption. It is dreadful to see an innocent lovely creature daily sinking under the languor of illness which may terminate in death at last, in spite of the most vigilant tenderness. A parent's misery in this distress you can more easily imagine than I can describe." And in another, written in the following month, she explains her selection of a place. "We are all going to Clifton, not because it is thought good for Maria, but because she fancies the place, and I know so well from sad experience how powerfully the imagination acts on a feeble frame, that I hope from the indulgence of her little whim to reap some benefit from the journey." That Maria's symptoms had not yielded to medical treatment is not greatly to be wondered at when one recalls the methods in vogue at this date. Mrs. Piozzi writes, March 27, 1798: "We dined, in Mr. and Mrs. Whalley's company, at Mrs. Siddons's last week. . . . Maria dined in the room, and looked (to me) as usual, yet everybody says she is ill, and in fact she was bled that very evening while we were at the lecture. Shutting a young half-consumptive girl up in *one unchanged air* for three or four months would make *any* of them ill, and ill-humoured too, I should think. But 'tis *the new*

way to make them breathe their own infected breath over and over again now, in defiance of old books, old experience, and good old common sense. Ah, my dear friend, there are many new ways, and a dreadful place do they lead to."

The friend to whom this was written plays rather an important part in the following correspondence, and her connection with the other *dramatis personæ* demands a short digression. As Penelope Weston she was a member of a literary and artistic coterie which included Mrs. Piozzi, Anna Seward (the Swan of Lichfield), Helen Williams, whose adoption of Republican principles and a domicile in France made such a great sensation at this period, Harriet Lee, authoress of the "Canterbury Tales," Dr. Whalley, the poet and traveller, whose first wife was her cousin, and others. Her most voluminous correspondent, however, was of the other sex, Courtney Melmoth, but it is a question whether he was more interested in her or in his own feelings about her, on which he is never tired of enlarging; at any rate the affair, for whatever reason, never got beyond the stage of a Platonic friendship. She had now been for some six years the wife of William Pennington, a personage of some local importance, who, as Master of the Ceremonies at the Hot Wells, may have aspired to repeat at Clifton the part once played by Nash at Bath, where at one time he was residing, and was the hero of a scandalous story told by Mrs. Whalley, which throws a curious light on the manners of Bath society at that period. "Billy Pennington," she writes, "has been in a

terrible way all this winter with an abscess in his neck. He is, however, much better, tho' still obliged to go about with his head all wrapt in handkerchiefs; in which state he attacked Miss Linton y^e other day and kissed her, upon which she bit his lip, which affronted the little man, and he spat the blood upon her cap, which she taking off to look at, he snatched it out of her hand and burnt it. Mrs. Leever, who, good woman, you know loves meddling, took opportunity to correct him for this behaviour a day or two after, when she met him in the field next her garden. He had, unluckily, been drinking, and abused her terribly, calling her all the names he could think of. She flew for shelter into the garden, he pursued, and seeing Mr. Leever, told him to take his old hag of a wife. Mrs. Plaister coming up at that instant to ask Mrs. Leever how she did, he accosted her as a meddling mischief-maker. They all got into y^e house, whither he followed, and upon Mr. Leever threatening to have him turned out, dragged off y^e old gentleman's wig, and after buffeting him, put it in his pocket. Y^e servants were then called, and he was turned out of doors. I hope by this time he has made proper concessions, and by the mediation of Mr. W. Leever, his father will be prevailed on not to prosecute him, which would be his utter ruin."

Curiously enough the letter which contains this story was written to her cousin, Miss Weston, who was destined, later on, to become the wife of the irascible "Billy." Before this occurred he had evidently sown his wild oats, and settled down

into a decorous member of society, or we should not read of him being "inducted" to the office of Master of the Ceremonies at the Clifton Hot Wells in 1785, "under the patronage of the Archbishop of Tuam, the Bishop of Cloyne, and with the unanimous voice of a numerous circle of nobility and gentry." The contemporary guide-book from which the preceding quotation is taken goes on to inform us of the regulations made by the M.C. soon after his "induction," for the purpose of "preserving the dignity of the public entertainments," which ordained, *inter alia*: "That no gentleman appear with a sword or with spurs in these rooms, or on a ball night, in boots."

"That the subscription balls will begin as soon as possible after seven o'clock, and conclude at eleven, on account of the health of the company."

Here, "distinguished by a medallion and ribbon," he presided over the entertainments of the visitors to the Spa for nearly thirty years, retiring with general regret, after a serious illness, in 1813. His marriage with Miss Weston took place at the close of 1792. Mrs. Piozzi writes to her on November 7 of that year: "We are all in the right to love Mr. Pennington, it is for all our credit to love him, and will be ever to yours; never were so many knowing ones taken in at once as would be if he proved worthless." And, so far as can be judged from the letters, her prognostication proved correct. Their home in Dowry Square, Clifton, was the place selected by Mrs. Siddons in which to leave Maria while she herself went on one of the provincial tours which she usually

undertook after the close of the London season. Mrs. Pennington was, as might be inferred from the circle of her friends, a woman of cultivated and literary tastes, and though possessed of considerable force of character, was endowed also with a large measure of sympathy and tact, specially needful in dealing with a case like Maria's. Having, as it appears, at this time no children of her own, she was perhaps the more ready to undertake the charge which she so conscientiously fulfilled, though she foresaw much more clearly than Mrs. Siddons the responsibility and anxiety of the position she was accepting.

Sally's next letter, written just before her departure from town, shows her still unwilling to confide entirely in her friend, but anxious to know whether Lawrence may not have been less reticent in the case of his own family and friends.

LONDON, *April 16th* [1798].

I must confess I was anxious to hear from you, and began to think you did not use me quite well in not answering my letter sooner. But, dear namesake (for it does not signify, I hate calling you Miss Bird, and surely, if we like each other enough to correspond, we may drop that formality; so henceforward, unless you give me to understand you disapprove, dear Sarah, or dear Namesake, or anything but *dear Miss*), your excuse was so reasonable that I was satisfied. You will think me in a great hurry to answer you, and so I am—quite eager to undeceive you respecting the idea you have taken into your head about Mr. C. Moore. Believe me,

my dear, what I said of male friends in general is perfectly applicable to him. *I see him come with pleasure, and depart without regret.* Indeed, indeed this is from the bottom of my heart—you must believe me sincere, and tell me that you do. I perhaps can divine the cause of this suspicion: do you not, judging from yourself, imagine the object which charms you must be to all irresistible? This is the error we all fall into, but tho' you will not own it to me, I suspect I have taken a load off your heart. Yet perhaps I have but half remov'd it. Well then, entirely to comfort you, I do not believe that tho' Mr. C. Moore frequently favours us with his company, he is any more interested respecting us than we are about him. He laughs and talks with unceasing gaiety and good humour, I never saw him otherwise, and these are not the tokens by which I discover a love-sick heart. *You have seen him otherwise, you know.* The Pylades and Orestes (I mean the Charles's) were here last night; they both desir'd me to remember them kindly when I wrote. I was employ'd for you, and you may soon expect some new songs. I have been composing lately, and one or two of the songs are much approv'd of; if you too are pleas'd with them, it will, believe me, raise them greatly in my esteem.

You will be glad to hear that Maria has at length burst from confinement; she has been three times out in the carriage, and has walk'd a little. She is much better than when last I wrote, her spirits are greatly mended, and of her health you may judge from her being allow'd to leave the house:

indeed I feel quite sure that when once she may go about, and dress and visit as she us'd, she will be *quite herself again*. There are some melancholy lines in your letter, my dear girl, which make me think that however calm and contented you are at present, your philosophy, of which you tell me you have some share, has been not a little exerted to effect your tranquility. You know too, I have sometimes observ'd an air of *tristesse* when we have been together. In short, I feel certain that you, like me, *have been* unhappy; but let me hope that the recollection only remains with you, and that however similar our cases *may have been*, you are not, like me, surrounded with doubts, fears, and perplexities, from which I see not how to extricate myself—oblig'd to appear chearful, while everything about me at times distresses or is totally forgotten by me. Oh, you cannot guess my situation, but you pity me, I am sure. I fly to employment to cheat the time, and tho' it sometimes fail, it is the best thing to be done. You give me credit for some philosophy; could you know the history of my life for the last two years, you would not call back your praise. I look forward to the time when we shall meet again; I think upon a nearer acquaintance we should not like each other less, and then should we not have a long story to tell? I think so. Miss Lawrence is, I suppose, by this time with you; pray mention me kindly to her: have either of you heard from Mr. Lawrence? I once took it into my head you corresponded. How strange Miss L. must think this last affair; this time last year—good heavens!—what changes have

I seen since that time. Do tell me if it does not to you appear almost impossible for that violent passion, of which you were so close a witness, to be entirely vanish'd? And yet so it must be, or would the treasure, almost in his possession, have been resign'd? Ten weeks ago, who could have foreseen this? . . .

I am ever yours with much truth and affection

S. M. SIDDONS.

The next letter from Maria shows her mind recovering from the shock of Lawrence's desertion, which indeed seems to have produced a salutary effect on a somewhat vain and frivolous character.

LONDON, *May the 6th* [1798].

You receiv'd a very *large*, if not a very long letter from Sally on Tuesday, dear Miss Bird, but I hope mine too will be acceptable. . . . I am pretty well, but for ever catching cold, and Dr. Pierson has made me very melancholy to-day. He tells me I must not think of stirring out anywhere, even to dinner, till I leave Town, and there is a long month to come ; but patience and resignation must be my virtues, and [tho'] they are severely try'd, the reward will, of course, be glorious. We are just return'd from a drive in the Park, where we saw some very fine Ladies and Gentlemen all looking very much delighted, it quite does one good to see such smiling faces. There was somebody so like you I could have spoken to her for you ; I think it quite disagreeable instead of pleasant to see faces that remind me so much of past happy times, and of

people I love. Indeed I wish it had been yourself, though I am a little angry with you for some part of your letter, where you wish I may resume my favourite employment of *conquest-making*. You are deceiv'd, I assure you, I have an *abomination* of it. Some people may do it innocently enough, but *I* particularly feel how wrong it is, and I hope I shall always shun it. I am very serious, you think, but I always am when I am suppos'd, even in joke, to be a *conquest-maker*. How little pleasure you have yourself, and you may render another miserable perhaps. I'm very sure you despise it as much as I do. You say a great many pretty things to me, and I am now so little us'd to hear them that I almost fear you flatter me: yet, if you do, I will imagine you love me well enough not to perceive it yourself. I had much rather be lov'd, I assure you, than admir'd, tho' I am so *fond of this admiration*. Well, when you knew me there was more justice in this accusation than there is now, I hope.

Sally sent you her new Songs, I believe; I'm sure you are very fond of "When Summer's burning heats arise," it is so sweet and melancholy. I should like to hear you sing them; don't be affected and say you do not sing them well, I know you must. I think Sally's own voice is even improv'd since you heard her, it may be my partiality, but I never heard singing that delighted me as hers does; there is something so touching in her voice that one must be in very good spirits to hear it without its approaching to even a pain. You were not in Town, I believe, when The Stranger came out; I long to see it much, and you, I daresay, have

heard enough of it to wish to see it too. My Mother crys so much at it that she is always ill when she comes home. We are all to leave Town the beginning of next month, I believe, for Clifton, and most happy shall I be to turn my back on this place, where I have suffer'd so much, and be permitted to stroll about in the beautiful lanes by myself. Do not tell me of a *pleasant partner* though, ah no, if you mean, as I suspect, some *lover*, I shall be much better pleas'd to think on no such people at all; I only wish to be quiet and get well. I don't mean though to say I wish to *frighten the people*, not at all; I shall be much oblig'd to those that will be interested about me, and they would not *offend* me by being so: but I should be *very* sorry if any were to waste *one* sigh on me, I'm sure, for too many giddy, foolish days are gone already, I think. I gave your message to Charles, he was here with Mr. Charles Moore on Sunday. You need not be jealous of Mr. M., I promise you, for he always speaks of you as of so great a favourite, that I'm sure nobody will ever attempt to rival you. . . . Mr. Lysons is going to give a fine Concert at his Chambers in the Temple: you have had the pleasure of seeing his curiosities, I believe, so have I a dozen times, and yet he has just been begging, now I am well enough, that I would see them again as a treat after so *long a confinement*. We are very wicked not to admire his antiquities, for he is so good a friend, and so good a man, one ought to care for what interests him so much; I really like him very much. There is the dinner bell, so I must go. Don't be so long writing

again, and believe me, dear Miss Bird, yours very affectionately,
MARIA SIDDONS.

“The Stranger” was an adaptation from Kotzebue, in which Mrs. Siddons took the part of Mrs. Haller, while her brother, J. P. Kemble, played the title rôle. Mr. Lysons, mentioned here and elsewhere in the letters, was evidently Samuel, the Barrister, a great friend of Lawrence, to flatter whose vanity he is said to have manufactured a Pedigree of very doubtful authenticity. This was the last letter Maria was destined to write to her friend; henceforward the correspondence was continued by Sally, whose next letter was not written till the Siddons family had taken up their quarters at Clifton.

PRINCE'S BUILDINGS NO. 6, CLIFTON,
Wednesday, June 13th, 1798.

I have been a great while answering your last letter, my dear Namesake, but I have often intended it, and have been prevented. Are you not surpris'd to see the date of my letter? I think when last I wrote to you we had determin'd not to come here, but as you see, it has been decided otherwise. Maria express'd a strong desire to come, and so on Saturday last we left London, and are here in a very beautiful situation. You know Clifton, and when I tell you that we look over the River upon the opposite woods, you will guess that our lodgings are delightfully pleasant. Maria is not at all the worse for her journey, and I hope this fine and famous air will soon restore her entirely to herself:—indeed I

have no fear of her [not] doing very well during the Summer, but I shall dread the return of Winter, it will, I very much fear, be a great trial to her. She begins to-day to drink the Waters, and to ride double. I have not walk'd about much yet, but I intend it, and promise myself much enjoyment under the Rocks before breakfast. I went to a Ball last night, which was not as pleasant as some I remember ; indeed the idea of leaving poor Maria at home, who us'd to be the foremost in all these gaieties, made me very sad, and as I was dressing to go, I almost wish'd I had refus'd the offer which had been made me of a ticket.

I am going with my Father to Bristol this morning, to try if I can find a Piano Forte : it is very strange that there is no one thing to be got at Clifton, where everything is wanted, and that one has all the way to Bristol to send. I was delighted that you lik'd the music I sent you so well, and when I am again in the way of getting as nice a Frank, I will send you some more, if I should compose anything I think you would like. I saw your friends the Charles's the night before we left Town. I don't believe I have written to you once since Mr. C. Moore desir'd me to send *his love* ; I star'd, smil'd, and repeated "*your love*" ? "Yes, yes," replied he, "my love ; she will understand me, it is not at all strange to send one's love to anybody for whom one has so great a regard." What do you think of it, my dear girl ? I did not know that *Gentlemen* sent their *loves* thus to Ladies without any meaning. Mr. C. Moore's love will probably make but a small impression upon you or me, but I

must confess this message, if my heart were more concern'd, would perhaps make too deep a one, and would have an effect never intended by him who sent *his love*, for it seems it means nothing.

My Father and Mother will stay here a month, I fancy. If Maria is pretty well, and in good spirits, I shall accompany my Mother, who wants a companion sadly in her Summer excursions. If however dear Maria should be low, or unwilling to part with me, I will not leave her. She will be with a very kind and old friend of ours, who lives constantly at Clifton, so we are certain that she would have every tender attention paid her. Adieu my dear Namesake, write to me, and believe me ever affectionately yours,

S. M. SIDDONS.

On July 1st Sally sends her friend some account of herself and her surroundings. "I have been well," she writes, "for a *whole month*; this is a long interval for me, I am thankful and enjoy it while I can. I am going to the Ball to-morrow, Miss Lee brings Miss Tickell from Bath on purpose to go with me:—not to-morrow tho', for that is Monday, and if it is fine we are all going by water to dine at a Gentleman's House who lives near King's Weston, where we shall stroll about, and return again by water. It will be very pleasant, and I should like it much better if our friends Mr. and Mrs. Pennington were not to be of the party, for her incessant talk is rather fatiguing, and the beauties of Nature call forth such a *torrent of eloquence* that there is no possibility of enjoying them in her company. It seems to me quite

impossible she can feel the sensations she finds such fine language to explain. When I am most affected I am most silent. The various and lovely scenery that surrounds us excites in me admiration and delight, but I cannot make a speech in blank verse upon the beauty of each individual object that presents itself, and to be call'd upon to go in an ecstasy robs me of all enjoyment.

"The Ball I mention'd is on Tuesday. I am fond of the mere exercise of dancing, and my partner must be odious indeed if I am not pleas'd to dance; if he is agreeable, the pleasure is double. I wish it may be my lot to meet with such a one on Tuesday, though I trouble myself but little about that, since, if I dance, I am *satisfied*.

"I hear the Charles's lament our absence with flattering lamentations: it's pleasant to be regretted, I had rather not live at all, than live to give neither pain by my absence, nor pleasure by my presence.

"I have been frighten'd from my walks under the Rocks by an impertinent fellow: this is a cruel deprivation, I enjoy'd it so! But I still walk before Breakfast, tho' in a more frequented place. . . . I must go and prepare myself to be ready for a Gentleman who is to call, and take me out in an open carriage. . . . I am rather a coward in any carriage, but he assures me he is a careful driver, and so, recommending myself to the protection of my good angel, I shall place myself by his side."

The Miss Lee so frequently mentioned in the letters was probably Sophia, who, with the profits of her "Chapter of Accidents," had opened at



MRS. SIDDONS

1797

Belvidere House, Bath, a flourishing school for girls, to which Cecilia Siddons was afterwards sent. In another of her plays, "Almeyda, Queen of Granada," Mrs. Siddons took the title rôle. She was assisted in the teaching of the school by her younger sister Harriet, best known as the authoress of "The Canterbury Tales," the earlier volumes of which were just making their appearance. They had long been friends both of Mrs. Siddons and Lawrence, whose future greatness they are said to have been among the first to predict.

Leaving Maria at Clifton in charge of Mrs. Pennington, Mrs. Siddons set out with Sally on a provincial tour in the Midlands, fixing her headquarters for a month at Cheltenham, from which place she paid visits to the neighbouring county towns. From this place Sally writes to Miss Bird, July 20th:—

I have been twice to the Play with some friends we have met with here, with whom one might pass the time pleasantly enough, if it did not rain so eternally as to prevent one's stirring out of the house. My Mother goes to-night to play at Gloucester, and I am going to the Ball here, where I shall no sooner have enter'd into the spirit of dancing than I must leave off, for they never dance after eleven, nor begin before nine: this is very provoking for me who am so fond of dancing and get so little of it. I could not go to the Ball at Clifton, which Miss Lee brought Miss Tickell from Bath on purpose to

go to, for unfortunately I was ill, and just contriv'd to get well to set off with my Father and Mother on Monday. . . . How it does vex me to see such creatures acting the first parts in the Tragedies! Our Hero, if you'll believe me, is that odious Mr. Russell, whom, if you have ever remark'd upon Drury Lane Theatre, it can only have been for his disagreeable voice and innumerable imperfections. It destroys all my fine feelings when I see my Mother sigh and lament herself for the sake of such wretched creatures. Can you conceive anything worse than that Mr. Russell acting the haughty, gallant, gay Lothario? I never approv'd of Callista's character extremely, but to be sure *such* a lover made her more unpardonable than ever.

The actor who excited Sally's ire in Rowe's Tragedy, "The Fair Penitent," must have been Samuel Thomas Russell, who had joined the Drury Lane Company in 1795. That she was not too severe in her strictures may be seen from Mrs. Siddons's first letter to Mrs. Pennington which follows. This is dated from Worcester, a city which must have recalled to the great actress some of the earliest memories of her childhood. At the King's Head in High Street, on February 12, 1767, Roger Kemble had announced an entertainment by his company of comedians (admission to which was secured, we are told, by the purchase of a packet of tooth-powder), consisting of a Concert of Musick, followed (in compliment, no doubt, to the "Faithful City") by the play of "Charles the First," the

work of an actor named Havard. In this his twelve-year-old daughter played the young Princess, while her future husband took the part of James, Duke of Richmond. Another similar performance included "Love in a Village," in which Sarah appeared as Rosetta. Here, too, she was sent to school at Thorneloe House by her parents, who made a practice of furthering their children's education in this way whenever their stay in any town was sufficiently long to permit it.

Berrow's *Worcester Journal* for July 12 thus announces her engagement: "The managers respectfully inform the ladies and gentlemen of Worcester and its vicinity that they have engaged Mrs. Siddons to perform during the ensuing Assize week, who will make her first appearance in the part of Callista."

The exigencies of space prevented any display by the local reporter, and the account of her performance is compressed into a very few lines: "The inimitable Mrs. Siddons performed Callista in 'The Fair Penitent' on Monday night, and 'Jane Shore' last night, at our theatre, with all her wonted ability, to very genteel and crowded houses. This justly admired daughter of Melpomene will likewise perform every evening for the remainder of the week."

Her first letter is naturally full of the topic which chiefly occupied her mind, the health of the invalid she had just left at Clifton.

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

WORCESTER, *July 26* [1798].

MY DEAR MRS. PENNINGTON,—Your goodness to my dear girl is what I expected, but I am not able to express my gratitude for it. Dear Soul, add still to the number of your favors by telling me every particular about her: her accounts to Sally are too general to content so restless a creature as I, unfortunately, must ever remain. I say ever, for at *these years*, if it were not incorporate with my flesh and blood, and making a part of my existence, I might expect to see myself void of this irritability. I know she went to the Ball, I hope it did her no harm. This weather has prevented her riding too; tell me about her pulse, her perspirations, her cough, everything! and tell me too that your mind is at ease about your brother. I am playing every night to very full houses, but how the people can sit to see such representations is quite wonderful, for anything so bad I never yet beheld, and I have seen strange things. The fat cakes, however, are quite as good as formerly, only that I find one suffices my appetite now, and formerly, I verily believe, I could have eaten half-a-dozen. I hope to get a frank for this scrawl, which I can tell you has not been written without stealing the time from other affairs. I have a maid who is not us'd to my exhibitions, and of course, playing every night, it is as much as I can do to prepare all day for my appearance in the evening. God bless you and yours, and your dear charge!—Believe me, ever your grateful and aff^e

S. SIDDONS.

Kind comp^{ts} to Mr. P. and Mrs. Weston, and all that tenderness of affection which a fond mother feels for so sweet and good a creature as my beloved Maria, pray give to her from me.

One is tempted to speculate on the nature of the "fat cakes" which the great actress found so seductive, and which were evidently a well-known local delicacy—perhaps after the fashion of a Banbury Cake—but the art is lost, and not even a tradition of them survives. The Mrs. Weston mentioned in the postscript was Mrs. Pennington's mother, who, being disappointed in her only son, found an asylum for her old age in the house of her daughter at Clifton, where she lived till nearly ninety.

So far as can be judged from this letter, Mrs. Siddons, though extremely anxious about Maria's health, anticipated no immediate danger, and still hoped that change of scene and the pure Clifton air might work a great improvement in her state, even if a permanent cure was not to be expected. But Mrs. Pennington was, from the first, under no such delusion, and as will be seen from what follows, was striving to prepare the mother's mind for the inevitable end.

Sally, writing to her friend on the following day, reports that Maria sends good accounts of herself, and has been allowed to go to two balls, tho' not to dance. "I pass'd my time," she continues, "very pleasantly at Cheltenham; we made two or three agreeable acquaintances. I went to one Ball, and danc'd all that was to be danc'd,

but I'm an indefatigable, and three hours will not satisfy me."

The next letter was written by Mrs. Siddons during the following week from Hereford, where she had been announced to play for five nights, commencing on July 31 with "The Fair Penitent."

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

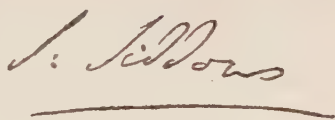
[*Postmark, Hereford.*]

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You give me all the comfort which a rational mind can communicate. It is a cruel kindness that flatters with false hopes—but how, how shall I ever sufficiently repay your goodness to my sweet girl, or express the comfort I feel in having such tenderness to repose my aching heart upon? The dear creature herself is as grateful for your kindness as it is possible, and says that she cou'd not have been so happy in any other situation absent from us as with you. This conviction greatly medicines the hard necessity which deprives me of the painful comfort of watching each change of her lovely, varying, interesting countenance. How sadly unfavorable is the weather, but let me hope it is settled with *you*, and that she is able to take her rides! But, "Oh, Heaven, I have an ill divining soul";¹ for surely since no greater advance toward recovery has taken place in this length of time, one can scarcely flatter oneself that she will be sufficiently restor'd to leave her present eligible situation by the appointed time, and I learn from Sally that she will not be prevail'd upon to exceed it. I

¹ "Romeo and Juliet," iii. 5, 621.

am sure I need not ask your endeavors, when fit occasion and time shall offer, to effect what may be thought best; and what may I not promise myself from such persuasive eloquence, accompanied by such tenderness and such unequalled attentions and goodness! I thank you, my dearest, kindest friend, for your promise of faithful and frequent accounts of my precious child. We leave this place to-morrow for Cheltenham, where we shall stay a week. Thank Heaven I shall play only *three* times there—and then to Birmingham for another week; in the course of this time I hope to God to hear something comfortable from you! But do not, dearest soul, do not, I beseech you, flatter me, for inured as I am to disappointment, it is still to me the *most painful of feelings*.

I must go and dress for "Lady Randolph," so God bless you and *all your house*. Give a thousand loves to my belov'd Maria, and tell her her mother's heart is always with her. Adieu, dearest and best of friends.—I am ever your faithful and affectionate

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "F. Siddons", written in dark ink. Below the signature is a single horizontal line.

The part of Lady Randolph in "Douglas," alluded to above, was one of those in which, after her first appearance and failure at Drury Lane, she won in 1777 that success in the Provinces which compelled the London managers to recognise her genius. It was revived from time to time at Drury Lane—*e.g.*, in 1793 Mrs. Piozzi writes to Mrs. Pen-

nington: "Mrs. Siddons is handsomer and more charming than ever; Lady Randolph took her leave of the stage last Fryday, and I saw the exertions she made with some anxiety, but here she is, as well and cheerful as can be." It seems always to have remained one of her favourite impersonations.

The next letter is written from Cheltenham, a place which, like Worcester, must have recalled to her many memories of her early career. Here, more than twenty years before, when as yet she had not achieved even a provincial reputation, she was acting in the "Fair Penitent," when, as it happened, Lord Bruce, afterwards the Earl of Aylesbury, was staying at the Spa. As a relief from the monotony of the "cure," a party was made up to see the performance, expecting nothing but a hearty laugh at the efforts of the strolling Company. Instead of this they were so impressed by the acting of the heroine, that the Hon. Miss Boyle (Lady Bruce's daughter by her first husband, Lord Dungarvan) introduced herself to the actress, augmented her scanty wardrobe, and became her fast friend. Not content with this they reported so highly of her that Garrick was induced to send down King on purpose to view the performance, which led to Mrs. Siddons' first engagement at Drury Lane. It is true she did not prove an immediate success, but it was undoubtedly her first important step on the ladder of Fame, though the succeeding ones were, for a time, delayed.

By the time she reached Cheltenham her eyes had been opened by Mrs. Pennington's letters to Maria's real condition. But for the moment her

attention is all concentrated on Sally, who was prostrated by an attack of the asthma, which, as her mother anticipated, pursued her through life.

The date of the letter is fixed by an advertisement in the *Gloucester Journal*, which announces her appearance at Cheltenham for three nights only, commencing on Tuesday, August 7, with "Jane Shore."

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

CHELTENHAM, *Thursday* [9th Aug. 1798].

"One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow. . . ." ¹

I receive your kind and rational letter by the sick bed of my poor Sally, who was rather ill before we left Hereford, and has never been out of her bed, except to have it made, since our arrival here on Monday. Mine is the habitation of sickness and of sorrow. My dear and kind friend, be assur'd I rely implicitly on your truth to me and tenderness to my sweet Maria. I do not flatter myself that she will be long continued to me. *The Will of God be done*; but I hope, I hope she will not *suffer much*! Perhaps, as Mr. Barry says, this terrible paroxysm may have been a sort of crisis! But, as you wisely advise I will be as easy as I *can*; and for the future, it is in [His] hand who knows best how to dispose of us. How vainly did I flatter myself that this other dear creature had acquired the strength of constitution to throw off this cruel disorder! Instead of that, it returns with

¹ "Hamlet," iv. 7, 663.

increasing velocity and violence. What a sad prospect is this for her in marriage? for I am now convinc'd it is constitutional, and will pursue her thro' life! Will a husband's tenderness keep pace with and compensate for the loss of a mother's, her unremitting cares and soothings? Will he not grow sick of these repeated attacks, and think it vastly inconvenient to have his domestic comforts, his pleasures, or his business interfered with by the necessary and habitual attentions which they will call for from himself and from his servants? Dr. Johnson says the man must be almost a prodigy of virtue who is not soon tir'd of an ailing wife; and sad experience has taught even *me*, who might have hop'd to have assured that attention which *common gratitude* for a life of labour in the service of my family shou'd have offered, that illness, often repeated, or long continued, soon tires a man. To say the truth, a sick wife *must* be a *great misfortune*.

This care too, my dear friend, you will condemn me for indulging, but it is my nature's fault to be thus ever anxious for the fate of those I love. Accept all that a grateful heart can offer, from your aff^{te}

S. SIDDONS.

I am in hopes of getting a frank for this letter, for tho' I know not why, or what end it answers to write so often, yet I somehow feel easier when writing to you; certainly it is the next thing to *talking* to you.—And my dear, precious Maria—Alas! alas!

You hear of poor Palmer's death—and why *poor* Palmer? for death is a *general* GOOD, and if his

peace was made, which I hope to God it was, *he* is particularly fortunate, for probably, had he liv'd, it would have been to have view'd "with hollow eyes and wrinkled brow an age of poverty; from which lingering penance of such misery" he's now releas'd; "herein has fortune shewn herself more kind than she is wont."¹ Our dear friend wou'd call this *Green-room cant*, I suppose, but it is difficult not to adopt the language of those who express one's own thoughts so much better than one can do oneself. Give the dear child a thousand tender loves from me, tell her she knows not how dear she is to me, and that she must not let even you supplant me in her affections, for she knows my jealous heart will not be content with Duty only.—Adieu! adieu!—Remember me kindly to Mr. P. and Mrs. Weston.—I must go dress for Mrs. Beverley—my soul is well tun'd for scenes of woe, and it is sometimes a great relief from the struggles I am continually making to wear a face of cheerfulness at home, that I can at least upon the *stage* give a full vent to the heart which, in spite of my best endeavours, swells with its weight almost to bursting; and then I pour it all out upon my innocent auditors.—What an unforeseen length has this scrawl grown to! And yet I must add my comp^{ts} and grateful acknowledgments to Mr. Barry, and my love to dear Miss Lee—and now I think I have done.

It is now between Twelve and One o'clock, and I am tired with my part. Good-night! my dear Friend.

¹ "Merchant of Venice," iv. 1.

I send you Mrs. Greatheed's letter, my dear Maria, with a thousand loves from your anxious, very tir'd, and affect^e mother.

You are better. GOD BE PRAISED!!! I shall be impatient to hear that change of air has given you better sleep. Sally is rather better, and sends her love. Good-night, my sweet Maria!

The allusion to her husband's attitude is, at first sight, somewhat surprising, seeing that hers was, undoubtedly, a marriage of pure affection, and seems to mark the beginning of that failure of mutual sympathy and confidence to which she recurs in later letters; and which, in spite of the attempts of some of her biographers to prove the contrary, must have been, to some extent, responsible for the separation which afterwards took place. And perhaps there is some excuse to be made for the husband, though the blame is usually cast on his shoulders. Siddons was a useful, all-round actor—Hamlet to Harlequin is his traditional range—but of no special talent: and in any case he was bound to be overshadowed on the stage by the commanding genius of his wife. In Society, where she was fêted and lionised, he could only expect to fill the rôle of "Mrs. Siddons' husband"; a difficult and not too dignified part. And even in the more intimate relations of family life, the majestic deportment and measured language which became habitual to the actress must have had a somewhat crushing effect on an ordinary and commonplace husband. Mrs. Piozzi, many years later, tells Mrs. Pennington how he once quoted to

her Cowley's verses as descriptive of his wife's person :—

“Merab with spacious beauty fills the sight,
But too much awe chastis'd the bold delight ;
Like a calm sea, which to the enlarged view
Gives pleasure, but gives fear and reverence too.”

Under these circumstances he seems to have done little or nothing towards the support of his family, and to have occupied himself chiefly with acting as his wife's agent and manager. In this capacity his business qualities were, no doubt, of great use to her in dealing with Sheridan and others ; but in the matter of investing her earnings he was not so successful, and some of his disastrous speculations (*e.g.* in connection with Sadler's Wells) must have kept the actress in harness long after she might otherwise have retired on a competence.

Mrs. Siddons' acquaintance with the great lexicographer, whose opinion she quotes, dated from 1782 or 1783. At first he seems to have regarded her as a mere passing Society craze, contemptuously referring to her as “that jade Siddons,” till one of his lady friends fairly bullied him into going to see her act. After this he modified his opinion so far as to invite her to tea at Bolt Court, where she made a still greater impression on him. He now styled her “a prodigious fine woman,” and writes to Mrs. Thrale : “Neither praise nor money, the two powerful corrupters of mankind, seem to have depraved her, and I shall be glad to see her again.” He was particularly desirous of seeing her in the part of Queen Katharine, but age and increasing infirmity prevented him from carrying out his purpose.

"Poor Palmer," whose tragic death she alludes to above, was the actor John Palmer, son of the doorkeeper at Drury Lane, who "created" the part of Joseph Surface in "The School for Scandal." His affairs had become hopelessly involved as the result of his venture in opening the Royalty Theatre in Well Close Square, and on August 2, 1798, he fell down dead on the stage of the Liverpool Theatre during a performance of "The Stranger," got up for his benefit by sympathising friends. He had acted King Henry to Mrs. Siddons' Queen Katherine on her first appearance in the part in 1788, and she was announced to assist at a benefit for his family at Drury Lane in September of this year.

"Our dear friend," whose criticism of her Shakespearian quotations she anticipates, was Mrs. Piozzi, better known perhaps as Mrs. Thrale, the crony of Dr. Johnson, the intimate friend of herself and Mrs. Pennington, whose constant correspondent she was for more than thirty years. After the death of her first husband, Henry Thrale, the brewer of Offley, whom she had married under pressure from her family, she consulted her own inclinations, scandalised Society, and alienated her own family by espousing Gabriel Piozzi, an Italian music master. The experiment turned out entirely happily at any rate from her point of view, and her time was now divided between Streatham Park, her late husband's home, and "Brynbella," a beautiful little house which she and her second husband planned and built in the vale of the Clwyd. She had an unbounded admiration for the talents and

character of "charming Siddons," as she usually calls her, and is never tired of extolling her perfections in her letters to Mrs. Pennington.

Mrs. Beverley was the part taken by Mrs. Siddons in "The Gamester," in which she appeared for the first time in 1783.

The mention of Mrs. Greatheed recalls a curious chapter in the life of the actress. Her parents were extremely averse from the idea of a marriage with Siddons, who indeed was dismissed from the company for his presumption in daring to aspire to her hand. In order that Sarah might be removed at once from the stage and the danger of his pursuit, she was placed for a time in the household of the Greatheeds of Guy's Cliffe, near Warwick. Nominally she was lady's-maid, at the modest salary of £10 per annum, but her chief occupation, according to Campbell, was to read poetry to the elder Mr. Greatheed. She left them when, two years later, her parents gave a reluctant consent to her marriage; but the family remained her fast friends, and she frequently paid them visits at Guy's Cliffe in the intervals of her professional engagements.

So far Maria's confidence had not been given to Mrs. Pennington, but the latter felt assured that the deepening gloom and depression which she observed in the face and manner of the invalid were rather the effect of mental suffering than of bodily weakness. Yet they were not the result of anxiety about the state of her own health, or even of the breaking off of her engagement to Lawrence and the loss of her inconstant lover, with regard to whom indignation was the pre-

dominant feeling in her mind. To dissipate this depression a change of scene was proposed, and a visit was paid to the Passage House on the banks of the Severn; but this, though it turned her thoughts in other directions for a time, failed to remove the secret cause of the anxiety, which soon showed itself more strongly than before. Recourse was then had to amusing books to cheer the spirits of the invalid, and most of the current literature procurable at the Hot Wells was exhausted with no better results. As a last resort Mrs. Pennington selected for reading aloud a clever novel, even then by no means new, "The Memories of Miss Sidney Biddulph," by Mrs. Sheridan, the mother of the great dramatist and statesman. In this clever work Maria evinced a keen interest; but towards the end of the story, where Orlando, the hero, is portrayed as in love at the same time with both the daughters of his benefactress, whose affections he has gained only to trifle with, her deepest emotions were stirred, the barrier of reserve was broken down, and she confessed, with a burst of uncontrollable emotion, that the story all too nearly resembled her sister's and her own. From this time her confidence was freely given to the friend who knew the whole sad story, and Mrs. Pennington soon discovered the cause of the secret anxiety which had been weighing on her mind. This proved to be a haunting dread that her sister might at some future time yield to the importunity of Lawrence, and consent to become his wife. To this she felt an insurmountable repugnance, being fully convinced that

such a union must inevitably be fatal to her sister's happiness. Mrs. Pennington pleaded, as she had promised Mrs. Siddons to do, all that could be said in favour of leaving Sally free to follow her own inclinations, should they ever prompt her to take such a step, but without effect; Maria's feelings on the subject were not to be altered nor her apprehensions allayed. Mrs. Pennington immediately sent a detailed account of what had passed to Mrs. Siddons, suggesting that she should use her parental authority in order to prevent the dreaded event, to which the latter returned the answer which follows, dated from Birmingham. She was no stranger in the busy Midland town. Mrs. Piozzi, in an undated letter to Mrs. Pennington, records the verdict of the "gods" on one of her earliest appearances—"A' moations noicely, but a' can't shaut out lawd." Later on they became as enthusiastic as the rest of the world. Campbell relates how, while shopping there in 1789, a wretched bust was pressed upon her as being the likeness of "the greatest and most beautiful actress that was ever seen in the world," the salesman, not inexcusably, failing to recognise the original as she stood before him. Bad as it was, Mrs. Siddons bought it, and trying to produce something better, commenced modelling in clay, in which she became very proficient.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

Thursday, BIRMINGHAM.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You have developed the character of your poor Invalide with a depth of

penetration, a delicacy of perception, and sweet indulgence, that at once astonishes and charms me. Yes, kindest of friends and most admirable woman, you see her *truly*, and can feel the DIFFICULTY it has been to temper disapprobation with tenderness in this dear creature's case. I feel with sorrow that this expedition to the Passage House has not done much, but that it has effected more quiet sleep is something. Sally is well again, and I thank you most sincerely for the sollicitude you have so kindly evinc'd for her future happiness. I *have* done *all*, my dear friend, that it is possible to do ; for before your last and most excellent letter I had suggested to her my doubts, my fears. The GOOD SENSE and TENDERNESS it was evident had *needed no prompter*, and, while she ingenuously confessed her predilection, she was as well aware of Mr. L.'s blameable conduct as any one could be, and declar'd that (Maria *totally out of the question*) she felt the weight of many other objections that seem'd to preclude the possibility of the dreaded event. "Parental *authority*" therefore, were I inclin'd to exert it, you see is needless. But in this *most IMPORTANT object of their lives* it has always been my system that they must *decide* for themselves. I will *advise*, I may *entreat*. Had Maria listen'd to my advice she had been spar'd the mortification she has felt, for *my heart never approv'd* her union with Mr. L., but restraint in these cases, we, who know the perversity of human nature, are well aware will only excite a *greater* desire, and *stimulate* to the attainment of our wishes. Had their intercourse been longer prohibited I doubt not the

marriage wou'd have taken place, and poor dear Maria (even in health), after the first raptures of possession had subsided, would have found herself in a situation, to a girl of her turn of mind, EXTREMELY PAINFUL; for *with* that decided way of thinking, she always honestly confess'd herself incapable of any exertion either of mind or body. So that there is an end of *that*. Therefore I shall never cease to bless God! And I humbly hope, from the mercy and goodness of Him in whose hands are the issues of life and death, that He will graciously vouchsafe His guidance to us for our *future* good!

I have been at the Theatre from ten till now almost one o'clock, and have got all my things to prepare for Isabella to-night, and have only time to add Sally's kind love to you, with that of, my most esteemed friend, your ever aff^{te} and grateful,

S. SIDDONS.

How shall I ever be able to repay your goodness, for I well know it is an irksome task that you have undertaken, an exertion of friendship which few, very few minds are capable of. What relates to Mr. L. and Sally in this hasty scrawl you may perhaps think it right to communicate to Maria. *That* to your own discretion—*never enough to be* ADMIR'D.

The order of Mrs. Siddons' movements at this period is rather obscure. If the succeeding letter is correctly placed she must have paid a flying visit to Brighton from Birmingham, and returned

thither in a few days. A letter from Mrs. Piozzi to Mrs. Pennington, written a little later (September 14), shows that her friends and the public were all somewhat in the dark. "I can no more imagine," she writes, "where Mrs. Siddons actually is than where Buonaparte is. The Papers announce her at Drury Lane, acting for Palmer's family. A letter from a friend at Brighthelmstone tells how she is playing Mrs. Beverley for the amusement of the Prince of Wales, Lady Jersey, Lady Deerhurst, and Lady Lade; and how she lives there in a house I often inhabited before I had the pleasure of knowing *her*. What *you* say induces me to believe her at the Hot Wells. Wherever she is, there is the best assemblage of Beauty, Talents, and Discretion that ever graced a single female character. She will have much to suffer, I'm afraid—but she will suffer with gentleness and submission, propriety and patience. *You*, my dear friend, will have your consciousness of well-doing to support you in this trying scene, but my heart bleeds for you."

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

BRIGHTON, [*August?*] 8, '98.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—When I reflect on the trouble and inconvenience you must endure on my account, I really know not in what terms to address you, and were I not as well assur'd of the generosity and benevolence of your heart as I am certain of my own eternal gratitude, I should fear your just demands upon it wou'd make me

an uneasy debtor ; but you I know feel "that a grateful heart by owing owes not, but still pays, at once indebted and discharg'd."

In my poor Maria I expect no material change ; but Sally, she, I hope, is better, and augur'd truly, that her fit would be short—yes, she, I hope, is well again? My poor Husband is quite lame, absolutely walking on crutches. Something is the matter with his knee, but whether Rheumatism, or Gout, or what it is, heaven knows ; and the terrible, yet not irrational dread of becoming a cripple makes him very melancholy—Alas ! alas !

This place is crowded with people that I know nothing of ; so much the better, for I am ill dispos'd to gaiety. I have played twice to fine Houses, and the Prince frequents the Theatre with great attention and decorum. He had issued his sublime commands (which, it seems, nothing but death or deadly sickness will excuse one from obeying) to have me asked to supper with him, which I, disliking the whole thing, had declin'd ; but when I came to talk it over with Mr. Sid., he thought it best that I shou'd recant my refusal ; and so I went to sup at Mr. Concannon's, where, as I had fear'd, I met Lady Jersey. However, the evening went off much more easily and agreeably than I had imagin'd, and as it is not likely to happen often, perhaps it was better to avoid giving the offence which I am assur'd I shou'd have incurr'd by a refusal. Lady Jersey is really wonderful in her appearance. Her hair was about an inch long all over her head, and she had ty'd round her head one single row of white beads :

this I thought was ill judg'd. She certainly wou'd look handsome if she wou'd not affect at forty-eight to be eighteen.

We are all in eager expectation of news from Ireland. Good God! what will be the end of it! —but we go on dancing and singing, &c., &c., and I, among the rest, sometimes force a *feeble laugh*; well be with the times when I ACTED *only* on the *Stage*! God bless you, my kindest, dearest friend! Accept for you and yours all that I can pay. Give my blessing to my precious children, and believe me ever your own

S. SIDDONS.

Mr. Siddons' malady, which proved to be of a rheumatic character, had not the effect of entirely crippling him, as he seems to have feared; but its hold upon him increased so much that for some time before his death he felt compelled to reside altogether at Bath, for the benefit of the waters, while his wife, who could not yet abandon her profession, remained in her cottage at Paddington.

There is no need to go into the details of the life of one whose character has been summed up as "a bad son, a bad husband, a bad father, a bad subject, a bad monarch, and a bad friend." It is enough to note that the final separation of the Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV.) and his wife had occurred in 1796, after the birth of their daughter; and while she remained at Carlton House, he resided almost continuously at Brighton, where he had spent immense sums on the building and decoration of the Pavilion, a sort of semi-oriental

seaside palace. Of the numerous scandals connected with his life there and elsewhere, the case of Lady Jersey, who had been chief Lady-in-Waiting to the Princess, and whose husband he had made his Master of the Horse, was the most flagrant. Public opinion was so deeply moved at her conduct that Mrs. Piozzi writes to Mrs. Pennington, 5th May, 1795: "The world, tho' wicked, is so enraged against my Lady Jersey, that people expect her to be hissed in her carriage or at the Theatres." It is small wonder that Mrs. Siddons, whose conduct was propriety itself, felt a strong objection to meeting her. Considerations of worldly prudence, however, as urged by her husband, prevailed, and, the ice once broken, she seems to have had no further scruples; for Campbell relates that she never was at Brighton while the Prince was there without being a guest at the Pavilion.

The anxiously expected news from Ireland was, of course, that of the suppression of the Rebellion. If, as appears from her letter, she had had no account of the battle of Vinegar Hill, the situation was alarming enough. An insurrection of unknown extent, spreading rapidly over the country; social, religious, and political hatreds finding vent in massacre and murder without distinction of age or sex; a French army landing on the shores of Ireland, and another only waiting a favourable wind to make a descent on England, makes a sufficiently gloomy picture.

Meanwhile Maria's weakness was daily becoming more obvious, and Mrs. Pennington felt it her

duty to open her parents' eyes to her critical condition, and the probability that the end could not be long deferred. As her mother could not escape immediately from her professional engagements, Sally was sent from Birmingham to assist in nursing her sister, in charge of the elder Macready, then managing the theatre there.

Soon after her arrival in Clifton she writes to Miss Bird, giving her an account of her sister's condition. "I found my poor dear Maria," she says, "much worse than when I left her; she was rejoic'd to see me, and my presence has so reviv'd her, she seems so happy to have me with her that I thank Heaven we so immediately determin'd upon my setting off for the Wells. Yet, my dear friend, this is but momentary comfort, for it is but too evident we have but little hopes, alas! none, I fear, for the future. The Gentlemen who attend upon her assure us there is no immediate danger, and tell us of persons who have been much worse and yet have recover'd; but I am certain they have no hopes of Maria's recovery, and I am prepared for the worst." The next letter was conveyed by Sally to Clifton.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

Fryday.

MY DEAR AND KINDEST FRIEND,—Your agonising letter to my husband was given to me this morning with another from my precious Maria. You can better imagine (prepar'd as we have been for what might happen) the affliction of my poor dear

Sally and myself. I felt some days since what a comfort it wou'd be to you as well as us that one of us shou'd come to your relief, and this day have determin'd to deprive myself of the companionship of my darling Sally, who sets out in a Post-chaise with a good soul who has undertaken to be her Guardian. By this means, too, we shall avoid the distress of meeting with Mr. L., who is come here, I understand, upon a visit to his sister. This charming girl has determined, and this day I told him so, to put an end to his expectations. It is two o'clock—I am harrass'd, fatigued to death, body and mind, and feel a heaviness that I will encourage—It is long since I have slept. I hope Sally will be able to get a bed without adding much trouble to all you have already undergone for your ever grateful and aff^{te} S. SIDDONS.

The Gentleman who accompanies Sally is Mr. Macready, the Manager of this Theatre. God bless him!

It will be seen from the next letter that Lawrence, as might have been anticipated, was not inclined to accept Sally's rejection of him through her mother as final. The latter's dread of some "desperate action" was not without reason; he had threatened suicide before if he were not allowed to obtain his desires; hence her anxiety to warn the household at the Hot Wells of his probable advent.

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

MY DEAR SOUL,—I know not if Sally has told you that this Mr. L. was at Birmingham when she left me. He has left this place without letting a soul know whither he is gone. His hopes with regard to Sally, I, with her own concurrence, told him were entirely at an end, representing at the same time the situation of her sister. I suppose he is almost mad with remorse, and think it is likely he may be at this moment at Clifton. I pray God his phrenzy may not impell him to some *desperate action*! What he can propose by going thither I know not, but it is fit they should both be on their guard. Mr. S. knows nothing of *all this*, the situation of dear Sally, when one recurs to her original partiality for this wretched madman, placing *her* in so delicate a situation, we thought it best to keep the matter entirely conceal'd, as it was *impossible* that anything *cou'd* come of it, if *ever*, NEVER, she was RESOLV'D, till her sister shou'd be perfectly restor'd. I hope it will always be a secret to Mr. S., as it could answer no end but to enrage *him* and make us *all* still more unhappy. Miss Lawrence tells me that her brother is expected at his Hotel to-day. I wish to God he may come, for the uncertainty of *what is become* of him is dreadful to us all. Adieu, my *dear* friend. I am *more* and MORE your aff^{te} and grateful,

S. SIDDONS.

I have seen dear good Mr. Macready.
If he *shou'd* be at Clifton and be impell'd to

make an eclat of this business, he will *ruin himself for ever*, and make us the talk of the whole world—it is dreadful to think of, and the effect on my *poor Maria*! Oh God! His mind is tortured, I suppose, with the idea of hastening her end. I REALLY, my dear friend, do not think so, and if one knew where he was, to endeavour to take this poison from it, he *might* be persuaded to be quiet. Dr. Pearson premis'd from the *very beginning* all that has or is likely to happen to her. But the agonies of this *poor wretch*, if he thinks otherwise, *must* be INSUPPORTABLE.

The fears of Mrs. Siddons as to Lawrence's course of action were but too well grounded. On leaving her he made his way to Clifton, put up at an hotel under an assumed name, and sought an interview with Mrs. Pennington, who, he hoped, if her sympathies could but be enlisted on his side, might grant him an opportunity of pleading his cause with Sally, and, what was still more important for his hopes, prevent her from making any promise to her dying sister which might stand in the way of a future acceptance of his suit. In one point, however, her judgment was at fault. His visit to the Hot Wells was not due to the "poison of remorse" at the idea of having hastened Maria's end impelling him to make reparation—her feelings for him he passes over as the "weakness of sick fancy"; his chief preoccupation was that they might not be a bar to the union he so ardently desired with her sister.

Mr. LAWRENCE to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

MADAM,—If you are generous and delicate (and talents should be connected with these qualities), not only the step I take will be excus'd, but you will render me the service I solicit, and keep it an inviolable secret. If you are not, or let suspicion of the person who requests it weigh against the impulse of your nature—it indeed matters not much, I shall only have heap'd on myself an aggravation of misery that at present is all but madness!

My name is Lawrence, and you then, I believe, know that I stand in the most afflicting situation possible! A man charg'd (I trust untruly in their lasting effect) with having inflicted pangs on one lovely Creature which, in their bitterest extent, he himself now suffers from her sister!

I love—exist but for Miss Siddons, and am decisively rejected by her.

If I have touch'd her heart—would I knew I had—her present conduct is the more noble, correct, and pure as every thought and action of her sweet character! If founded on the consideration I hope it is, I will not, dare not rail, hardly murmur at the decision which exalts the Object of my Love.

Be assur'd, Madam, the Paper I have enclos'd has in it nothing contrary to this sentiment, and it is therefore I have confidence in requesting that you will, at a fit but speedy moment, give it into her own Hand.

I know, Madam, that secrecy should always be justified by Reason; and the reasons for it in the present case are very obvious. Miss Maria's



SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE

situation is, I know, a very dangerous one. *If it is REALLY render'd more so by feelings I may have excited, the least mention of me would be hazardous in the extreme.* If it is not, and her complainings on this head are but the weakness of sick fancy, perhaps of Hope, wishing to attribute her illness to any other than the true fix'd and alarming cause, still it will be giving an additional distress to her Sister, and afford another opportunity for wounding me with a real, THO' NOT INTENTIONAL, Injustice. I know her rectitude and worth!

Here, with apologies for this abrupt intrusion on a Lady almost a stranger to me, my Letter should end—but it cannot, and I must trespass on your time still more.

There are moments when the mind must free itself from its sorrows, and Strangers have the Tax of confidential friendship, but mine are of such a Nature that the disclosure of them to common characters would be a Madness. It is to *you* that I unbosom myself, the Friend of my dear Miss Lee, of Mrs. Siddons, and of *her* of whom I cannot now think or speak with esteem, but with anguish insupportable!

My situation is a desperate one, but my Soul is yet unwilling to be subdued by it. A dreary future, shadows, clouds, and darkness resting on it, and no gleam of Light to cheer the Prospect. All answers to me in the negative, "Yet Love will hope where Reason would despair."

That Hour of severe distress in which Affection for the lamented Object invests every Thought and Action with Angelic Purity; when the querulousness

of Sickness becomes the Complaint of Injur'd Virtue ; when Hints are Commands, and implied Wishes (however irrational or fancifully construed) binding as the most sacred duties ;—should that moment soon arrive—God ! God ! avert it !—how dangerous will it be to that trembling Hope which, half-broken as it is, my heart still cherishes as its sole spring of Life !

To guard against its Enthusiasm by rational argument and those precepts of Wisdom which, applying to the case in general, are just and salutary in checking rash determinations, fatal perhaps to future happiness, but which the mind regards with reverence from the moment they are form'd, *that very moment when Reason was lost in Grief* :—To do this (I dare not ask it, but) surely it would be a part worthy of Mrs. P——, and certainly the most benevolent to me that Friend could act.

I am afraid to say more, tho' I think I have hardly said too much. The Million not in my situation would tell me I have taken too great a liberty. The few under circumstances at all similar, that I had unbosom'd myself too far.

Your answer will inform me if the former are right ; but for the latter it is sufficient that I am justified to myself. By a profligate daring I might see Miss Siddons, but I cannot. Yet something I must do, and what better than at once repose a confidence in a Woman of Sense and Honour, trust implicitly to her Candour, nor believe that I shall suffer by it till the suffering comes ?

I have done it, and perhaps *all of my future happiness is at stake, and in your Power.*

I hope for your speedy answer, and shall submit to it, though it may be against me, with great Respect. Only do not tell me that I have been imprudent in acting with so little foresight, that I should have look'd more to consequences, that Passion should have its bounds and Love its caution, and that it is indelicate to interfere tho' the peace of a Fellow Creature may be determin'd by it. There are times when very good Advice, and just, tho' somewhat common Discretion, have the character of Apathy, and wound the Heart without benefiting the Understanding.

But I do not look for this from you. You know, and doubtless feel for, my situation, and will believe, without any serious assertion, that all Thought and Reflection is not banish'd from my Mind, though, God knows! at present obscured by uncontrollable feelings, and the stings of bitter Anguish! If you meet my Wishes, I cannot hope for the fortune of seeing you often; but never shall I without regarding you as my Benefactress—never think of you and forget the service you render'd me; never hear your name without the liveliest Emotions of Gratitude and Esteem!—I am, Madam, your very devoted Servant,

THOS. LAWRENCE.

Pray, if you can, pray give it to-night.

A letter directed to Mr. Jennings, to be left till call'd for at Gloucester House, will find me.—You know it is right I should conceal my name.—Indeed I have hardly suffer'd my eye to glance at your House.—Can it be sent by to-morrow morning?

Mrs. Pennington's reply is not preserved, but it will be seen from what follows that she consented to see Mr. Lawrence, though not in her own house, and endeavoured to curb his impetuous nature by a conditional promise of an interview with the object of his affections.

MR. LAWRENCE *to* MRS. PENNINGTON.

My blessings on you both! A thousand times! But do not say that I come to add to your distress and affliction! God knows I meant not that. Yet, too true, my coming must do it. How strange it is to-day that I am comparatively happy. What can have made me so? O! I thought she was dead!! But your window somewhat convinces me that it is not so. The Almighty be praised for the hours, the minutes, he spares us! Sally, dear angel, shall I indeed see you!!!

Dearest, dearest friend, adieu!

I will be compos'd. You shall see I can.

The character of the interview which followed may be guessed from the style of Mr. Lawrence's correspondence, and the burlesque account which he himself gives of it in a later letter. His attempts to work on Mrs. Pennington's fears were baffled by her firmness and calm good sense. After witnessing his frantic gestures, and listening to his threats of suicide if Sally would not give him the assurance he desired of becoming his, she quietly told him "that she had seen such scenes better acted before, and that if he wished to secure her friendship, or hoped for her good offices, a rational and composed

behaviour was the best way to obtain them." From her pity, however, he gained something. Her compassionate heart could not listen unmoved to the tale of his suffering, and though she could not be prevailed upon actively to further his suit to Sally, she promised him frequent, if not daily, reports of the condition of the invalid, and of any circumstances which might affect his hopes with regard to her sister. Soothed by these concessions, and, as it would appear, by a meeting with Sally, he was induced to leave a place where his presence could only be a source of anxiety and difficulty. He returned, accordingly, to town by way of Birmingham, where Mrs. Siddons was still detained by her professional engagements, and had two more trying interviews with her, of which she gives a lively account in the following letter.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

Oh my dear friend, how my heart bleeds for all the trouble and anxiety you have and will endure on my account; indeed, indeed it does. I shudder to think on the effect this wretched madman's frenzy has had on you. *I* know the effect too well, for he well knows he has TERRIFIED me into my *toleration* of his love for Sally by the horrible desperation of his conduct; and if his own words are to be believed, I have more than once "shut upon him the Gate of SELF-DESTRUCTION by compromising (thou' without that self-possessing wisdom) as you have now done. Yes, that dear Sally is indeed an Angel, and, my dear Friend, she lov'd him; think

then on the tremendous situation I was placed in, and let my tenderness for his feelings be the excuse for my weak indulgence. *You now know* the whole, and *she* has *seen* and *known* enough of *him* to make her *wary*. You will advise, you will warn this best beloved of her Mother's heart—you, to whom it has been given to calm the sea when it roars wildest, for to that dreadful image have you well compared this unhappy man, on whom an EVIL FATE *seems to attend, and wreaks its vengeance on all the most* UNFORTUNATE SOULS WITH WHOM HE IS CONCERN'D. That so many excellencies shou'd be thus alloy'd by ungovernable Passion is lamentable indeed. A duteous Son, a tender Brother, a kind and zealous friend: all these he is. I have *seen* him, and I bless God and you that you have reason'd him out of some extravagance that might have been dreadful in its present or future effects upon my POOR GIRLS or on himself. He appeared to be extremely repentant, and I was impell'd not only by policy but commiseration to treat him with more lenity than I thought I cou'd have done. I gave him my sincere forgiveness and calm advice, but told him positively that he had NOTHING MORE to hope from ME except my good wishes for his success and happiness. Oh, may I never have the painful part to play again! My love to the dear girls, and best regards to Mr. P. and Mrs. Weston; the former I fear wishes you had less regard for your unfortunate friend, God knows, with reason. God bless you, "discreetest, wisest, best."—I am your ever grateful

S. SIDDONS.

I have receiv'd my belov'd Sally's comfortable letter. Oh, tell her how proud her *Mother is of such a child*. Mr. L. set off for London last night after pacing about here for three hours in agonies that brought me almost to fainting three or four times. He went off calmly, however, and with resolutions to be all that cou'd be wish'd. I hope for his own sake he will, for *we* I trust have seen the end of our sufferings from him. How I long for the 24th, yet dread to see the alter'd face of my sweet Maria.

Wednesday.

You will receive a letter of mine to Mr. L. from Miss Lee. I was wild with my fears, and thought she might know something of him. Send it to me if you please, for it will save you the trouble of again requesting him to burn the letters. I was so shaken by his wild transports yesterday, that, on rising to ring for some hartshorn and water, I should have fallen upon the floor if he had not fortunately caught me at the instant, and was totally incapacitated to play last night.

Mrs. Siddons was, of course, kept fully informed of what passed at Clifton. Her next letter, written, like the preceding ones, from Birmingham, shows her feeling of relief that the scandal she feared had been averted, and incidentally throws some light on the pressure under which she had been induced to consent to the transference of Lawrence's suit from Maria to her sister. The rumours of his pecuniary embarrassments, to which she alludes, were probably correct. Lawrence was now an

Academician, a fashionable portrait painter, and had for some years enjoyed Court patronage ; but, though he was not personally extravagant, he had practically supported his whole family from boyhood. Moreover, method and economy were utterly foreign to his character, and, to the end of his life, in spite of wealthy patrons and large commissions, he was always harassed for money.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

Fryday.

Dearest, wisest, best of creatures. Oh ! *imagine* all that I *wou'd* say to you, for it is impossible for me to express it. Yet do not let your affection for *me* induce you to be too resentful of this poor wretch's conduct, for indeed I *do* believe the violence of his grief for all the sufferings he had been the cause of, was the then powerful feeling which he cou'd *not* command : and when one adds to this that he has so *completely* thrown away his *own happiness*, let us temper our indignation with pity, even for his weakness and folly. We must also take into the account that the agitated state of *my* nerves acted perhaps *more powerfully* on me than there was just cause for. You tell me that you are to be "very good friends." Perhaps you are to write to him ; your wisdom needs no warning from *me* not to let his arguments (and he can wield them with some force) induce you to depart in a *single instance* from the present arrangements, and, as I *gave* him my FORGIVENESS, do not let his mind be *again* IRRITATED by bringing his parting visit to

me to his recollection. No, let us keep him quiet by all means that are *consistent* with our *own safety*; do not name it to him, for God's sake! lest he shou'd be flying off in ANOTHER *whirlwind*! We have already had too many proofs of the weakness of his Character, we have felt by sad experience how little he is master of himself, and no wonder that the sight of her on whom he has heap'd so many and bitter sorrows should have operated powerfully on a mind thus irritable, and stung almost to madness on the retrospect of *them* and his OWN FOLLY. Let it compensate *you* and DEAR Sally that his visit, in the end, quieted my agonis'd spirit so completely that I rested well, and have been a *new creature* ever since. It was *necessary* that he shou'd see me, and I really believe that he came resolv'd to be *compos'd*, but he is the *creature of impulse*, and I verily believe the REMORSE he felt was too powerful to be mastered by HIM. I believe I told you that he went away *compos'd*, grateful for my forgiveness (tho' that comfort was allay'd by my *solemn assurances* that he had nothing *more* to hope for from *me*), and determin'd steadily to pursue a course of conduct which shou'd regain his credit. I hope to God he *will*, for his *own* sake, but I fear his natural propensities have been so strengthen'd by the habits of indulgence that there is little to be expected in point of improvement from a man who at the age of THIRTY appears to have so little control over himself.

Oh, how those dear words, "WE ARE ALMOST HAPPY," have comforted me! *You*, and my *own* DEAR SALLY, first and best of

creatures!!! This is a cordial drop indeed in the cup of affliction which I still fear my sweet Maria's fate will make me drain to the very dregs. I dread the sight of her dear alter'd Face! Present me with kindest regards to dear Mr. P., and believe me with unalterable admiration and gratitude ever your aff^{te}

S. SIDDONS.

P.S.—Let not my belov'd Sally fear *my* persevering *firmness*, dearest of creatures! Does she not know it was the dread of making HER *unhappy*, which, ever since that terrible visit that followed Miss Linwood's Exhibition, has forced me into toleration: when, without the least consideration for poor Maria, I was even on my knees to prevent his rushing into her presence. Yes, I will own that tho' I cou'd not wonder at the effect my adorable Sally's perfections had wrought upon him who was in the daily contemplation of her perfections, I believe no time, no change, could wear away the unfavourable impression of his selfish, unfeeling conduct at that tremendous moment. He said it was madness, and the fear of losing them both, for, next to Sally, he adored Maria. And will this insanity be ever cured?—there's the terrifying doubt. But I have long had some reason (for she is truth itself), from her own mouth, to see her mind, recover'd from the surprise at these sad events, and from the terror he had thrown her into, had meditated the ill consequences of this attachment, and the instability of the character of Mr. L. These late efforts of her extraordinary wisdom and unparallel'd sweetness have shown me her *whole*

heart, and I shall now pursue the *straightforward path* without the fear of *wounding HER peace*. But how, my dear, my glorious child, shall I sufficiently applaud the tenderness, the uprightness of thy conduct? If you cou'd *see* the tears of admiration and love that now stream from your Mother's eyes at this moment, they *might* perhaps express what words *cannot*. How every *new* day and *new* situation calls out to admiration the powers of thy mind! May the blessing of that God who has thus gifted thee as constantly attend thee as the prayers of thy

ADORING MOTHER.

Mr. L. is certainly in London. I have been so worried with settling matters previous to my departure while writing this scrawl, that I fear it is scarce legible. Adieu! adieu! I am afraid there is but too much reason to believe the affairs of this unhappy man are very much derang'd. He told me some time ago, when he was *as* mad about Maria as he is now about Sally, that, if she rejected him, he would fly, to compose his Spirit, to the mountains of Switzerland. Maria reign'd sole arbitress of his fate for *two years*, or more. The other day he told me, if he lost Sally, SWITZERLAND was still his resource. Oh! that caprice and passion shou'd thus obscure the many excellencies and lofty genius of this man! Tell my sweet girl how infinitely more she *deserves* than I *cou'd ever* endure, in tenderness to her repose.

It will be gathered from the foregoing letter that Lawrence's conference with Mrs. Pennington

had to some extent calmed his feelings, and induced a healthier frame of mind. He was, for the moment, full of penitence for the anxiety he had caused Mrs. Siddons, and of good resolutions to deserve her regard in the future. But the recollection of their last stormy meeting was too fresh in her mind to allow her to place much dependence on his protestations, and her postscript lifts the veil a little from the scene at the critical moment, when, after a two years' engagement to Maria, he was seeking to procure a recognition of the transfer of his affections to her sister.

Miss Linwood's Exhibition, which Mrs. Siddons refers to, consisted of historical and other scenes, all executed in needlework by the lady whose name it bore, who, with infinite patience, went on adding to it for over thirty years. In 1831 it consisted of some sixty pieces, and Miss Linwood, then in her seventy-fifth year, had just added a large panel of the "Judgment on Cain," which had taken her seven years to complete!

The succeeding letter, written by Lawrence on his arrival in London, shows him, perhaps, at his best, and suggests, to some extent, the character of the ingenious and persuasive eloquence which won over Mrs. Pennington to his side, and soothed the just resentment of Mrs. Siddons.

Mr. LAWRENCE to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, 25 Aug. 1798.*]

DEAR MADAM,—The agitation of mind that compell'd me on the late event to force myself on

your notice must be my excuse for any rudeness of which I have been guilty. As I remember, I left you as I should any common acquaintance, and thank'd you as I should have thank'd them for any trifling favour, on any the most trifling occasion. But you must know how deeply I am penetrated with your kindness, and though I can believe you are too fastidious to be much gratified by any praises but those of your own Heart, mine shall still be offer'd, and in the form most pleasing to you, the assurance of my returning quiet and peace of Mind, to which, but for your kind interposition, I had been now a Stranger.

I wish we had another conference together, that I might convince you, as I doubtless could, how reasonable has been every act of madness of which I am accus'd, and how very rational every wild Chimera that threaten'd me with the loss of this dear Girl; but I see you are wilfully a bad logician, or else think men have more consummate vanity than they really possess, or you would have found in the perfections of this unparallel'd Creature an obvious source of all my Terror and Despondency.

I know my own feelings, and have Sincerity enough to let all the world see them, but your Friend has had the Address to keep hers a total secret, so that while in her eyes I am beneath a Jones, she in mine is more than a Clarissa (for as to Sophia, 'tis a very good young Lady and no more). Your reasoning indeed was admirably adapted to allay my apprehensions: "Be calm, Sir—for there is no one to match her; compose yourself—for her charms are countless! Why should you be agitated

when nothing that you can say can move her? And why put on the despairing Lover, when all your efforts are so completely unavailing?" But a little daring sophistry is convenient in matters of Love, and you think it may play its part in Friendship, especially with a Madman. Dear Madam, "I am but mad nor-nor-west; when the wind's southerly I know a Hawk from a Hernshaw."¹

In the course of our conversation you told me that you were conjur'd to say nothing that could be hurtful to my feelings, at least as little as possible. Now don't be offended with me! but did she insist on your telling me that "I was mistaken *in my system*—that she was not a girl to be won by rant and violence?" To say truth I did not sit down coolly to consider the most POLITIC mode of securing her affections. She was gone, and I flew after her, because I could neither know peace nor rest till I had seen her, or at least had such an explanation from her as satisfied me that I ow'd the loss of her Society to Necessity, and not to Choice.

I have not much of the Cameleon about me: the color of my actions will be that of my mind, changing, I am told, too often, but always belonging to the real Creature and not taken from Surrounding Objects. Even the woman that I love I must love in my own way, and, at the moment when I most dread her displeasure, will not hesitate to tax her with Indelicacy and Injustice, if she accuses me of endeavouring to influence her affections by dishonourable means. No! if I win the prize it must be by the genuine emotions of my Heart: One that feels

¹ "Hamlet," ii. 2, 525.

Passion perhaps in too wild excess, but would disdain the proudest (ah! *this*) Conquest, if only Hypocrisy could atcheive it. I hop'd I had been *known*.

But do not tell Sally I COMPLAIN of her. 'Tis wrong to think of one slight wound from the Hand that has heal'd so many.

You make a very just distinction between Courage and Fortitude,—the former, not the latter, is the Man's. Yet he can suffer much. *I* certainly have, and more than I thought myself capable of supporting. Is it vanity then that makes the recollection of the past less bitter? No! It introduc'd me to Mrs. Pennington—and made my Enemy my Friend! Dear Madam, and after this can you think of treating me as a common man? Can common men perform these wonders? "To take her in her Heart's extremest hate—And yet to win her!" O finish it, say "All the World to Nothing!" Not a fine broiling day that comes but I shall be thinking of the Field behind the Bear, and my "much enduring" Friend trudging backwards and forwards for very Life, regardless of Complexion, Fatigue, or Character (for the crowds that were looking at us!!), and then "flumping down, never minding what she be about," upon a dusty Bank; the shoes wore out—the Legs unable to support her—and all but the kind Heart exhausted in the effort! Was ever love-lorn Shepherdess under the Hawthorn so interesting as Mrs. Pennington under that scrubbed Oak, with not one atom of Romance about her, AS SHE SAYS, and only the victim of it in others;—but Romance—where is it to be found if

not in you? You are the very Creature of it, and if, to swell my triumphs, I bring you not into some mischievous scrape, that shall draw forth as hearty a Curse as Lady's lips can utter, may every countenance deceive me as yours has done; or (but 'tis going too far), may I yield up the talk of Mrs. P. to hear the decisive nothings of Mrs. N[ugen]t!!

May I glance to one dear Subject? No—you are not to mention me, I suppose, nor even continue a conversation that may lead to it. All is to be guarded

AS MY CONDUCT SHALL BE.

Yet I think it may at some moment be remember'd that I am no longer the sturdy Beggar, but the humble Pauper, not claiming, hardly expecting, the least offering from your Bounty; but should it by some strange chance arrive, receiving it with the welcome of the liveliest Gratitude! To hear that I am still lov'd—that in some pause of Sorrow one of the purest Hearts in the Creation yet beats for me, though hardly daring to tell itself the cause of its vibrations:—You know how I should bless you for the news, and will not wrap yourself so confidently in your virtues as to be indifferent to the prayers of one who, from this moment, *you know is to be a Saint!* My Sally's truth I rest upon as on my Rock. *My* constancy is now not doubted. It is to Time then that we are both to trust. "The rest is silence."¹

I saw your Letter on Mrs. S——'s Table. How I wish'd to read it! *Don't think poorly of me that I did not.* You know that I left Bristol the same

¹ "Hamlet," v. 2, 699.

evening, and the next day again beheld that Countenance “which never look’d on me but with kindness and affection,” except when the Frown was prompted by every right feeling of her sweet Nature. Surely there are some Beings sent into our sphere for the sole purpose of showing us “they are not of this World.” That Dear Woman has suffer’d more from this wayward Child, whose Tears are now attesting his repentance, than all the agonising feelings her Genius has excited. Yet she is willing to forgive and almost to forget them, could Memory be commanded—my most inveterate Foe. Well, the Future must be my Friend. This last act of ~~Desperation~~ [sic] (wrong,—wrong,—not so—I was the Gamester, “Reason would lose what Rashness may obtain,” then it was Wisdom). This, however, with my wretched suspicions of her undeviating truth, have left an irritated feeling that all my remorse is unable wholly to subdue. On you, my dear kind Enemy, I throw the labour; *and I beseech you enter upon it with all the energy of your Character; with your very Heart and Soul! Think of my Gratitude! Think that you are working out the happiness of two Beings destin’d (yes, with all my frailties), destined for each other by Love and Mind, by every feeling and perception of Heart and Intellect.* Look too at your Friend, and at that wasting Lamp her Children’s bliss shall feed and renovate,—God! how it needs it. Conjure her to believe me. Tell her she is deceiv’d; that, like the Prophet, I come with blessing and not a curse; and that every action of my life shall prove it. To wound has been my shame and torment; to heal shall be my

pride and joy! It is a new Soil her bounty has now to work upon, and its fruit shall be happiness and peace. Tell her—DO ALL THIS—for yours is now the power; and if it may be some feeble incentive to your efforts, remember that you will be united with her in my Heart, in every feeling that is honorable to myself and grateful to my God. A Being swears this, who, frail and wretched as his Nature is, has yet one indelible impression of his Maker on it, that Virtue is his delight and aim, and Vice his fix'd contempt. Many a Phantom has he pursued, but it has worn her Dress; many a Shame has been his portion, because he was deceiv'd, not deceiving. Farewell, dear Madam! I have tir'd you, and worn out myself. May the end of these exhausting agitations bring tranquillity to all, but only *can* it do so by *Sally's being mine*.

MARIA!! THINK OF MY REQUEST! *The Drawing is begun*. LET ME KNOW OF HER!! I will write again, pray pardon me for it, and for paying for this.

Piecing together the allusions to his interview with Mrs. Pennington contained in Lawrence's letter, it appears that there was another reason for his visit to Clifton besides his fear of Maria's exercising an influence on her sister which might be fatal to his suit. Sally, as we have said, was not disposed to commit herself by a too precipitate return of his passion, and had kept such a strict guard over her feelings that he had begun to suspect there might be another suitor in the field, and even connected her sudden removal from



Mrs. Siddons
By Sir Thomas Lawrence

Birmingham with this entirely imaginary personage. This is evidently the ungrounded suspicion for which he apologises, and which Mrs. Pennington had treated as the delusion of a madman.

The drawing he speaks of at the close of his letter was a portrait of Maria (now unhappily lost), one of those crayon heads which were Lawrence's forte, and which show the delicacy and refinement of his style almost at its best, without suggesting its limitations so obviously as his oil paintings. His portraits of the other members of the Kemble and Siddons families are legion. In the previous year, besides his great portrait of Mrs. Siddons (now in the National Gallery), he had attempted to immortalise her by including her in his one attempt at imaginative composition. Mrs. Piozzi writes to Mrs. Pennington, 1st June 1797: "I have been to the Exhibition. Lawrence is the Painter of the Day, and to prove that he can shine equally in describing a *rising* as a fallen Angel, he has seated Mrs. Siddons at Lucifer's feet." This was his "Satan," which unkind critics likened to "a mad sugar-baker dancing naked amid a conflagration of his own treacle."

From this point Mrs. Pennington began to keep copies of her replies to Lawrence's letters; partly that Mrs. Siddons might be kept accurately posted in the position of affairs, but chiefly for her own justification and protection in the event of possible complications and scandal, which the character of her impulsive correspondent made only too probable.

Mrs. PENNINGTON *to* Mr. LAWRENCE.

Yes, I perceive you are a great Magician, and I will frankly confess you have found me out. I have felt enough in the course of my Life to wish ardently for the power of subduing my Feelings, and have been enough school'd by the bitter Lessons which abus'd confidence and chilling disappointment have inflicted, to overcome Romance, and destroy all enthusiasm of character. These checks, however, have reached my Head only, my Heart still retains its sympathy with many of my former bearings and inclinings; and I could not see the violent agitations which shook your Frame, without becoming once again the Creature of Impulse, and obeying the dictates of the moment, which were to console you at any rate. You were most unhappy, or you play'd your part too well for my detection. Nay, there were so many reasons why you *should* be so, that it was morally impossible you should be otherwise; and whether this effect was produced by your own conduct, or what other cause, was little to the purpose at that moment. All that I had a right to blame was indulging the *excess* produc'd by those emotions, regardless of the fatal consequences that might, nay, that *must* have attended an unfortunate or imprudent disclosure of yourself and object. But you suffer'd yourself to be persuaded, and became entitled to my esteem, which is not lessened by the perusal of your Letter; and with all your perverted feelings on this subject (because seen only through the medium of extravagant and indulged Passion), you cannot do

me justice if you do not believe me relieved and comforted by its contents.

And now you have gained so much ground, compleat your victory. I have no cold Apathy in my Nature, but I honor a well-governed mind ; and though I may commiserate those who lose sight of this Power without the exercise of a rational discretion, I cannot preserve my own Peace, or protect those who are dear to me. The Child of mere Impulse cannot be what you term yourself, and I am well inclined to hope are, "the Votary of Virtue, and the Enemy of Vice." Love this dear Girl (Sally), but love her with a sacred and reasonable devotion : with that love which shall consecrate her true interest in your heart superior to all selfish considerations : which not only leaves her in the present distressing crisis in the unmolested, conscientious discharge of her duties, but prompts her to the performance of them. I saw so much "method in your madness" in the first ten minutes I passed with you, that I am convinced you *can* be all this. You bid me assure Mrs. Siddons (and I honor you for all you say of that excellent Woman and much-afflicted Mother), that you will "prove a blessing, not a curse, to her aching Heart." You say that "to wound has been your Shame and Torment—to heal shall be your Pride and Joy." Be it so, and then you shall live in my memory also with the few whom I wear in my "Heart of Hearts." One way only lies open to this salutary end, by governing your passions, and by preferring the peace and tranquillity of those so deservedly dear to you, to the gratification of those

impetuous propensities, which I call *selfish*, but to which, doubtless, you give some finer and more agreeable name. I do not consider you a "common character," or treat you as such, for then I should whistle you down the stream, and leave you to fret, and strut, and cool at your leisure. Who told you that I was your Enemy, or when did you make the sagacious discovery?

I am sincerely and affectionately attached to Mrs. Siddons, and Sally is very dear to me; how then can I be your enemy while you resolve not to be theirs? But I am the enemy to all extravagance of conduct, and if by yours you continue the Foe to their Peace, be assured, with all your Vanity and my "Romance," I shall hate you incontinently. You are very saucy, and give me a most ridiculous picture of myself, and of the inconsistencies I was guilty of in our late conferences. Surprise and agitation left me very little Mistress of my own powers, and I am conscious I was much more influenced by Sensation than by Reason in my mode of arguing. It was difficult to compose a Medicine suited to your case. "Physic for your Fever" was necessary, and cordials for your support. I was compelled to administer both as the irritated state of your mind could bear it: but whatever I said in the name of dear Sally, I must very gravely assure you, was simple fact. I did not exceed my commission.

You have been extremely smart on me, and must bear retort, and pray permit me to ask, what less can a man of sense and principle expect from a creature of rectitude and intelligence like S. S.,

than that if he was weak enough to shock her with the horrible idea of *Suicide*, she should assume energy enough of Character to give him the reproof he merited, by shewing him she despised the threat? And by so doing she paid him a much higher compliment than by admitting the possibility of such an atrocious act, even for a moment, or flying with frantic folly to save the Ideot or Madman from his fate. True Love does not seek to scare or wound the peace it values by such hideous Phantoms;—as a momentary flash of delirium she regards it, which she well knew the better man would rise up and master;—but it is a weapon beneath you, and wholly unworthy the Gifts with which the Almighty has enriched Thomas Lawrence, at any time, or under any circumstances, to wield. What end can such rash and violent expressions answer, but to fright gentle Love from a pure and guileless Mind, and to fix a sort of Horror there? And what can any man mean by giving way to such starts of Phrenzy? If he is so unprincipled as to mean what he says, I would sooner trust my happiness to a modern Philosopher, French Atheist, or an Illuminée, which, thank Heaven! dear Sally assures me you are not; and if he does not mean it, *what can* he mean, but to terrify? Therefore, believe me, a Woman is not to be accused of “*Injustice*,” who presumes to shew her Lover an honest resentment and contempt of such conduct. This dear Girl’s Mind is as firm as her Heart is tender and affectionate. The present critical and uncommon state of circumstances in which she is placed calls forth all her energies. She is really elevated above

all thought of Self,—alive only to her duties. She declares her soul is so full of the present mournful claims upon her, that she will not trust herself with a thought of the *future*, nor will she promise anything but to esteem you as you may deserve, and always to retain a sincere interest in your Honour and Prosperity.

I do not, with this noble-minded Girl, find it at all necessary to observe the rigid path you, I believe, half-jestingly (and I am glad you can be pleasant on the subject) suppose. We talk often of you—sometimes with a kindness that would be flattering—often in a style that you would not at all approve ; because we lament that so many good Gifts as you possess, should be rendered in a great measure abortive by the eccentricities that shade your character ; and instead of the excelling Thing you *might* be, leave you the mere Slave of Passion.

The present is an awful space, proscribed by illimitable barriers, between you and the object of your affections : the future, in its best view, presents obstacles innumerable, if not insurmountable. This is the time to gain the ascendancy so necessary over your own mind, not to be done by yielding to every impulse and start of feeling, but by possessing it with that sense of Rectitude, which shall prepare you to meet, with becoming resignation and dignity, whatever the future may produce. You have much to do, and to *undo*, my friend, before you can be deserving of this excellent Creature, should fortune and circumstances ever favor you so far as to put the prize within your reach.

Think only, for the present, of subjecting and governing your mind.

I have done my best to set the case fairly before you, probably wearied, and perhaps offended you in the attempt, and shall continue to exert myself, to the best of my powers, for the ease and comfort of all. In this feeling I desire you to believe me,
much and truly yours,
P. S. P.

Lawrence's reply to this letter is, unfortunately, lost. As his letters were all forwarded to Mrs. Siddons for her perusal, it was probably mislaid by her, or accidentally omitted when the others were returned to Mrs. Pennington. Its general tenor, however, may be gathered from her answer. Before the letter was written the crayon sketch of Maria, previously mentioned, was forwarded from London, accompanied by the following note. Its formal and reserved style, in marked contrast to the artist's previous effusions, is accounted for by the hope he evidently entertained, that it, as well as the portrait, would be shown to the invalid. To avoid unnecessary agitation of her feelings, it was thought well that both should be kept from her at the time, though she was afterwards made acquainted with the circumstance. The address in Greek Street from which the artist writes, was that of the studio into which he had recently moved after the death of his parents, and which formed his professional headquarters till 1810, when he removed to 65 Russell Street, where he remained till his death.

Mr. LAWRENCE to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

MADAM,—Imagining that any faint resemblance of a young Lady, dear to all who have ever known her, must on many accounts be particularly interesting to you, I have taken the liberty of sending a small drawing of Miss Maria Siddons for your acceptance.

I am too little known to you to let that honour be the sole excuse for this step. There must be some motive for it, and if I dar'd, I would say that I made the Drawing from feelings of high esteem for the original, and in consequence of gratitude to you.—I am, Madam, your very obed^{nt} Ser^t

Thos Lawrence

GREEK ST., *Sep^r the 1st*, 1798.

The letter which follows, though it conveys Mrs. Pennington's thanks for the portrait, was evidently written primarily as an answer to the lost letter of Lawrence mentioned above, to whose character and contents it affords the only available clue.

Mrs. PENNINGTON to Mr. LAWRENCE.

Sep^r ye 4th, 1798.

DEAR SIR,—You have favoured me with a Letter compounded of ingenuity, wit, and sarcasm. These are very amusing qualifications in a Correspondent; in a Lover, perhaps, I should not be very fond of tolerating the licence, and in a

husband I should certainly fear, as much as I might admire, the spirit: but I am inclined to think great part of what lies before me is rather written *at* dear Sally than *to* me; and it is only honest to tell you, that she has the firmness to resist taking any part in this correspondence, and will neither peruse, nor hear read, your Letters, nor my Replys. This is a very masculine trait of character, for which, I dare say, she will appear highly reprehensible in your eyes, and for which indeed I think forgiveness, on your system, cannot be accorded her. I perfectly comprehend *how you love*, and the sort of yielding "soft soul, and silly," who would stand any chance of holding her empire in your heart; but Sally is not exactly this, though sometimes silent, and always feminine and tender. I therefore foresee a very natural termination of this business in due time, and without any *bloodshed*.

I am extremely interested by all you say, but not at all convinced. I own it extremely masculine and vulgar to exercise plain reason and sober sense on such a subject, but I have contracted an awkward way of thinking for myself, and attach just as much importance to all this bustle about *Love and Murder* as the experience of forty years authorises. I am, however, fully persuaded that, when the indulgence of our passions becomes injurious to the peace and interest of others, it is a duty incumbent on us not only to controul, but to subdue them. There was no reasonable ground for that excess which so lately hurried yours out of bounds. There were reasons sufficient to justify both mother and daughter in their conduct, and none to furnish you with one

rational apprehension of a *Rival*. Could there have been one in question at *such* a crisis, under *such* circumstances, a woman so volatile and unstable could neither have merited your love nor esteem, much less the sacrifice you seemed ready to make her of your senses. Yet you say, you "must esteem the woman you can love." How could you esteem the woman who, at *such* a moment, had played such a game, and taken a new lover? But I beg your pardon—as I am not in love, the error of being found rational may be excusable in my case. One charge I wish to exonerate my sweet young friend from,—that of *indelicately* exposing the weakness of her Lover. An accident, I cannot just now explain, betrayed that part of your letter to me; though in a moment of so many conflicting feelings, *had* she imparted it to the bosom of a discreet and sympathising friend, I really think it would have been very excusable; this, however, was not the case. I wish I could say half as much in vindication of a gentleman who owns he voluntarily, and in a cool hour, abused the confidence of the woman he loved, by exposing her "two last letters to the perusal of his dearest Friend;" a transaction that, situated as the person I allude to is with S. S., nothing can justify. There is no mind that could be candid enough, under circumstances so recent, to reconcile to her honour and advantage an intercourse with the apostate Lover of her Sister. Forgive me, if I am severe, but I grieve over the knowledge of this particular for the sake of both.

I admire your simile of the "*lake and the river*";

however, if I were to indulge a spirit of Prophecy, it would be that this dear Girl has been so scared by the "Precipice," and stunned by the "Torrent," that she will be very likely to sit down by the "*Lake*" in "single blessedness." Or should she like the "River" better, it will be one that neither sparkles nor foams, but like our own Thames, so beautifully described in the well-known poem on Cooper's Hill, that pursues the "noiseless tenor of its way," diffusing equal pleasure and utility. Indeed, poor Thing, her current is so often arrested by indisposition, that life ought, in the short intervals of ease allotted, to glide very smoothly; a full third is absolute annihilation! To the great increase of my cares and anxiety, she has been, for the last week, totally confined to her chamber, and her sweet faculties, for the greater part of that time, locked up by the power of that dangerous medicine, which alone relieves her from the effects of the dreadful constitutional complaint, for which there appears to be no efficient remedy; and its so frequent return is scarcely less melancholy, though not so immediately alarming, as the case of her sister.

I wish I could say anything consolatory to you on Maria's subject. The Lamp emits each day a rather more feeble ray. Yet all is lovely and interesting! The state of her mind respecting *you*, I thought I had fully portrayed in my last;—there is no variation in it, nor can we lead to the subject. With your knowledge of that degree of self-love which is interwoven into most of our characters, and which was certainly a prominent feature in this sweet creature's, you may well suppose that her

most favorable sentiments of an unfaithful and inconstant Lover must ever be indignant:—that they are so, and *not tender*, you should hear with a sort of generous pleasure, or at least satisfaction. She said once, lately, she “wished Mr. Lawrence no ill, and freely forgave him the uneasiness he had caused her”—make your own comment on these words, and spare me further on the subject.

The drawing is just arrived, and demands my best thanks, though I hardly think myself entitled to it, as I cannot fulfil the conditions. I know it was intended as a peace-offering to Maria, and am persuaded the present is not a fit season to mention the subject. She would connect it with the idea she so recently entertained, of your having been here, and had an intercourse with her Sister: this idea seems to have again subsided, and its revival could produce no other effect than an increased irritation, ever most injurious to her. If she lives to return to London, she shall know of this gift in your own graceful manner. The drawing has the stamp of a great Artist, and, what I prize more, a striking resemblance of features for which I shall always retain a fond and tender remembrance; and once more, I sincerely thank you, dear Sir, for this treasure.

Mrs. Siddons is expected on the twenty-fourth. I long for, yet dread, the hour of her arrival; it will, however, somewhat relieve me from a degree of care and anxiety that I find at times almost too much for me.

And now, as our modes of thinking are not likely to be congenial, and as my manner of writing

so little pleases you, we will draw this correspondence to a close. I shall, however, at any time, be extremely willing to satisfy your anxiety briefly on our poor Invalid's account.

I have never apologised for the inhospitality of my conduct while you were at the Wells; the peculiarity of the circumstances will, I hope, plead my excuse. Should chance or inclination bring you to the place in happier times, Mr. P. and myself will be gratified in shewing you every attention in our power. Adieu, then, and believe me, with every good wish for your tranquillity and happiness, greatly your admirer, and very sincerely your friend,

P. S. P.

Appended to the above letter is the following memorandum in the handwriting of Mrs. Pennington :—

This torment of a man again importuned me to prevail on Sally to receive his letters, and renew their correspondence, and I was compelled to return him the following concise and rough reply—

“The Being you persecute is not sufficiently impassioned to go the length of your heroics, and you are too Pindaric a genius to be at all content to love and go on like ‘Folks of this world.’ You will therefore continue to torment each other for a while, and then, weary of this ‘delightful anguish,’ by mutual consent, give up the point. Much more time is necessary to give the past to Oblivion than your impetuosity and restlessness of temper is disposed to admit, and Sally will not lose sight of

what she owes to herself and others; and therefore I think I know perfectly *what the end must be.*"

Again—"Your having been tempted, by *any* motive or consideration, to expose dear Sally's letters to the observation of any one but Mrs. Siddons, is a bar to the renewal of correspondence not to be got over. Here, then, the matter must rest; I positively will no more enter on the discussion of these points."

So far I had made notes of the letters I wrote, being the medium through which poor Sally chose to transmit her sentiments and feelings to Mr. Lawrence. I wished, in case any change took place in her sentiments, to have my justification in my own hands; but after that period, as Maria's situation became more decided, and her end approached, *his* mind got softened, and the interchange of letters (confined in subject almost entirely to the state of the poor Invalid) became so frequent that I kept no copies.

The next hurried note from Lawrence was the result of his hearing the news of another attack of Sally's malady, which was being treated, as appears from the last letter, with laudanum, in quantities sufficient to produce unconsciousness for considerable periods. His friend Mr. Twiss, who conveyed to him the disquieting intelligence, was the compiler of a concordance to Shakespeare, and is said to have cherished a hopeless passion for Mrs. Siddons, but consoled himself with her sister Frances, who, according to the testimony of her niece and namesake, the younger "Fanny Kemble,"



FRANCES KEMBLE
(MRS. TWISS)
1784

bore "a soft and mitigated likeness to her celebrated sister." Mr. Twiss she describes as a "grim-visaged, gaunt-figured, kind-hearted gentleman, and a profound scholar." Mrs. Piozzi, who was introduced to him about this time, in a letter to Mrs. Pennington calls him "a fierce man, with a brown Brutus head" (a fashionable wig at this period), and adds, "I feel afraid of all the men that wear it." Mrs. Siddons had obtained for her sister an engagement at Drury Lane in 1782, but she only remained on the stage for four years, retiring on her marriage in 1786. At this time they were evidently living in London, and on intimate terms with Lawrence; but later on, in 1807, she opened a Girls' School at Bath. She is then described as being "as big as a house," in contrast to her husband, who was "very thin, stooping, and ghastly pale," but both exceedingly kind and good-natured.

MR. LAWRENCE to MRS. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, 7 Sep. 1798.*]

Indeed, my dear Madam, you must excuse my again troubling you so soon. How *can* I be silent, when I know that this dear Creature is ill! I heard it last night from Mrs. Twiss. Let me beg of you one line, but immediately, to inform me how she is.

As far as respects dear Sally herself, I think of this complaint with terror, to see that fine mind sinking under its influence, and to know her so deeply conscious of the infirmity, cannot but fill one with the deepest sorrow. But let me think of

it only as a small privation of happiness to myself, and view it, no, not as a trifle, but as a blest occasion for affection to *prove its tenderness, and faith its stability*; and as giving me the means of vindication from the calumnies of light minds, in the very circumstance which they had prophesied would prove their truth. Never have I lov'd her more, never with so pure an ardour, as in the last moment of sickness I was witness of (the period she must remember), when, in spite of the intreaties of her dear Mother and Maria, I stole into her room, and found her unconscious of the step of friend or relation; her faculties ic'd over by that cursed poison, and those sweet eyes unable to interpret the glance that, at that instant, not apathy itself could have mistaken. No, my dear Mrs. P., if her days of sickness *trebled* those of health, still she should be mine, and dearer than ever to my heart, from the sacrifice of this distrustful and selfish delicacy to confidence and love; from this generous pledge of her esteem and trust in the *heart* of the man she loves. In ardour I fear it is beyond her own—in tenderness, truth, and constancy it shall not be behind it. Never! never! never!

God bless you! dearest madam.

THOS. LAWRENCE.

Mr. LAWRENCE *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, 8 Sep. 1798.*]

DEAR MADAM,—This is my last letter, and you will, therefore, pardon me for writing it. “Wit,

ingenuity, and sarcasm," do not belong to me; I am but "the cause of them in others."

From a shade of difference of opinion we both run into contrasts that are as far from truth as union. The "soft, yielding soul, and silly," is as little to my taste as to Mr. Shandy's, and I will not believe that your hatred of Mr. Goodwin arises solely from his having defam'd the champions of your sex. But how does the "soft, yielding soul, and silly" accord with "Sally's not being sufficiently *impassioned* to go the lengths of my heroics?" One or the other must be given up—let it be the former, for truth's sake.

You ask me seriously how I *could* have *esteem'd* a woman who, at such a moment, had play'd such a part, and taken a new Lover. My answer is—when I suspected, *did* I then esteem her? Have you ever lov'd and are ignorant that *one* BASE ACTION can in a moment root out esteem, while love's fibres, tenacious of their hold, take *many*, and days, and months, and longer, to tear from the fond heart? But you are ignorant in nothing—you only *WILL be blind*. But I am presumptuous and foolish to criticise your letter. There should be nothing on my part of irritation in our correspondence, but *every feeling* of *regret* that it is terminated so soon.

The relief (and it is a very great one) you have afforded me I am delighted to impart. Good God! I would as soon cut my hand off as show a letter of my dear Sally to any one human being existing, however attach'd to them by friendship or relation. Look at my letter and you will see it was a retort

just dull enough to be mistaken for truth—a faint joke for a cutting reality—a pun on a death-bed! Forgive the little triumph, and then swell it into rancour and malignity, only confessing that it extorted from you at least a page and a half. Now this is one evil consequence of keeping my letters to yourself; had you shown it to Sally she would have found me out at once.

You are mistaken, my dear Madam, in estimating the powers of your friend. The Torrent, the River, or the Lake—she is the landscape gardener, and can make it what she will.

Adieu, dear Madam. Receive my gratitude for the kindness, the honour you have shewn me, and pardon everything that has seem'd to vary from this sentiment. It is the true, the lasting one, that is attach'd to your image in my mind. I wrote yesterday a letter in great haste respecting the illness of sweet Sally. I shall know if she is recover'd by your silence, but pray, if she is not, *give me one line by the next post!* Thank you for all you *can* do about Maria, for I know it is what you *do*. Every day she is mingled with her Sister in my prayers.—I am, dear Madam, ever yours,

THOS. LAWRENCE.

Mr. Lawrence's next letter is the real reply to Mrs. Pennington's last communication, and was meant, like hers, to close the correspondence. But whatever their intentions may have been, her promise to keep him informed of the invalid's condition inevitably led to its continuation. Though Mrs. Pennington did not always keep a copy of

her replies, Mr. Lawrence's succeeding letters sufficiently explain the situation.

Mrs. PENNINGTON to Mr. LAWRENCE.

HOTWELLS, *Wednesday Night, 11th Sep.*

DEAR SIR,—True to my promise, I seize the first moment to cheer your mind with the glad intelligence that dear Sally breathes again, free, and at ease, and is altogether *so well* in the space of twenty-four hours, that I am astonished when I reflect how very ill she has been, and how much we have all suffered on her account for this fortnight past! As for poor Maria, there is no alteration, and as we could not rationally expect it would be for the *better*, I hope there will be none before her dear Mother arrives.

In justice to you, and also to myself, I have *insisted* on Sally's perusing the whole of our correspondence. I am not, however, authorised to *add anything* on the subject. Yet indeed I practise no *mystery*. My heart is the simplest book in the world. I affect no apathy, I aim at no extraordinary flights of discretion and prudence, nor advise any *forbearance* and *self-controul* that I do not *know* to be perfectly practicable. I feel for you most sincerely, and I wish you happy with all my soul—but I *fear* more than I hope for you; because I much doubt, at all events, your pursuing the means, or waiting the time, necessary to render you so, in the only path which you seem to think, at present, can lead to that end.

Adieu, dear Sir—that you may reap the full

value of those admirable talents and fine qualifications you so abundantly possess, and long rejoice in a rich harvest of love, honour, and fortune, with all the virtues combined, is the warm wish of
Your very faithful friend and Serv^t

P. S. PENNINGTON.

Meantime Miss Bird had met Mrs. Siddons, and had been taken into her confidence, so far at least as the existing situation was concerned. Writing to her friend on September 15, Sally, after giving a melancholy account of her sister, proceeds:—

“ I look forward to the greatest of comforts, we expect my belov'd mother in a week, and greatly as the joy of this meeting will be damp'd by poor Maria's situation, yet to me it will be the greatest comfort and happiness, if at present I could feel happy. Blest in the society and love of that best of mothers, I scarcely feel another want, but absent from her, there is a vacancy in my heart nothing else can fill. You are become better acquainted with her, my dear friend, and have overcome the prejudices which made you afraid of her. Now then you can imagine *what she must be to me*, not only the tenderest of parents, but the sweetest and most indulgent of friends, to whom my whole heart is open, and from whose sympathy and consolation I have found comfort and happiness in moments of severe affliction. Depriv'd of every other blessing, I must still be thankful for this great blessing. . . . Your conjectures, my dear Name-sake, were too just on a certain subject ; it was

not possible at such a moment of distress, that you and my Mother could be so much together without opening your hearts to each other—you know all, I doubt not. What an aggravation to my present misery are my reflections upon that unfortunate affair! Heaven grant that restless being may be quiet, at least with respect to us. That he can ever be happy is, I fear, impossible. His strong genius and disposition impel him to seek for and to conquer difficulties; the object of his desires, once obtain'd, *becomes indifferent*, some new idea fills his imagination, more danger must be encounter'd to fulfil his wishes, and thus, I greatly fear, a life will be pass'd, which might have been spent, *oh, how differently!* with more steadiness and consistency of character, joined to talents and fascination which no mortal ever was so highly gifted with!! Thank heaven, dear Maria's mind is perfectly tranquil concerning him, she thinks not of him, or if she does, it is only to hope that I will never have anything to do with this, *our common enemy*, as she calls him."

Mr. LAWRENCE to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[Postmark, Sep. 18, 1798.]

Oh Mrs. P. I hear dreadful news! That she is rapidly growing worse, unable to walk at all, astonishingly alter'd, the cough worse, and the *legs swelling!!* You cannot be so cruel as to be angry with me for writing. Pray, pray, tell me the fact, I beseech you, as you look for your own peace, and the prayers of your Grateful

T. L.

Forget my last foolish letter, yet how could I *but* be elated on the recovery of that Angel. Bless her!

MR. LAWRENCE *to* MRS. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, Sep. 29, '98.*]

Do you expect my gratitude to be so disinterested as that I should love you equally when you send me bad, as when you are the herald of good news? You know my nature, and the human mind too well, and that at this moment I am only not *worshipping* your image. We are acquainted with Hope—always “fallacious” till we find it realis’d.

Since I receiv’d your letter I have been silent, ordering my servant by signs, I fancy, lest talking should discompose the serenity of my soul. See what respect I bear for the feelings you excite!

I daresay I am *remember’d*, “for fame results not more from good than *evil* deeds.”

Be not apprehensive about my composure: it is now so fix’d that the most trifling matters can engage my attention—things the most indifferent in nature, devoid of sense, taste, purity, or tenderness—I could amuse myself last night with the letters of Miss Siddons.

Adieu, dear Madam! Till Monday at ten I am not myself, but the Being you would have me.

THOS. LAWRENCE.

What an hour yesterday from eleven till twelve! but Mr. Twiss had receiv’d no letter from Mr. S.

That was certain anchorage. How is the Immortal ?
But you tell me.

“The Immortal” was, of course, Mrs. Siddons, to whom Mrs. Piozzi applies a similar phrase in a letter to Mrs. Pennington, dated 13th Jan. 1795. “Charming Siddons is somewhere in the North, setting up the individuals of her family like nine-pins for Fortune to bowl at and knock down again. She meantime secures glorious immortality in both worlds.”

Mr. LAWRENCE *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, Oct. 2, 1798.*]

How agitating are the present moments. To banish hope is impossible, to cherish it, madness ! Yet of this madness I must be guilty. No letter to-day—then my dear friend is still the same ; and to-morrow !—to-morrow, perhaps, I shall have a letter to tell me she is still better. “Till then, sit still, my Soul.” Those unfeeling Blockheads, the Newspaper Writers, have been torturing us with the death at full length. Would to God there was a penalty that might teach them humanity ! For can there be a more wanton breach of it than thus readily inserting an unauthorised report of so agonising a nature ? For God’s sake take care how it reaches Mrs. S., who indeed I meant by the “Immortal.” I trust your fears about her are unfounded. For occasions Nature supplies exertions and strength. In my short life I have borne much more than I thought I could, so have you and all.

My composure is, and is not, composure. In everything of imitation there is something of reality, and that little my efforts do not deny me; but I wish at this moment that I had any other profession, for this leaves my mind too much upon itself. The eye and the hand work mechanically, and my mind is in the chamber with Maria and the pale circle round her. The sweet girl, though, is "cheerful, collected, and quite awake." O! Hope, for one ray of thine, to make us so who hear it!

I am very glad that Sally has walk'd out. Dear Creature! I dread to hear of this cruel malady again appearing; though on that subject I have been set much at ease, within this day or two, by some medical people. Nothing of injury to the constitution is to be dreaded from it, *nor from the remedy, at all*, except in cases of inflammation. *Ah, poor Maria!* God bless you all! All, without one exception—you cannot *name* one. Am I *still* remember'd, though days have pass'd? Adieu, dearest friend! Your grateful LAWRENCE.

Mrs. PENNINGTON to Mr. LAWRENCE.

Tuesday, 2nd Oct^r.

This dear girl continues to exist *without food, without sleep*; and under so much suffering from increased debility and exhausted nature, that I conjure you to join your prayers with mine, that the *next* accounts I transmit you may be the *last*. Yet I greatly doubt that being the case; the pulse and voice indicate a capacity of enduring much longer, and suffering still more. What further can

I say to you? 'Tis a sad task to enter on from day to day! You boast of *composure* now, my friend, as a *settled principle*; it is at this crisis become an indispensable duty, and I charge you *not to lose sight* of the *practice*.

In confidence that you *will not*, shall I dare to tell you, that I have kept my faith?—that the drawing has been mentioned, not seen; that both Mrs. S. and myself have spoken to *her* of *you*; and that I request you to be satisfied with the assurance, that SHE awards you what is generally understood as CHRISTIAN forgiveness, and to entreat you will enquire no further? Macbeth, you know, wou'd see Banquo's Issue in the glass.¹ I neither wish to "shew your eyes nor grieve your heart," for I am, with the sincerest sympathy, yours,

P. S. PENNINGTON.

Reading over what I have written, it occurs to me that you may probably suppose some scene of *solemn* import has passed, in which the poor Sufferer, conscious of her *real* state, has spoken to that point. Alas! every reference of *this* sort is carefully avoided, and she sometimes *sedulously deceived* with false hopes, and amused with ineffectual remedies. Yet her *face*, poor thing, cou'd she see it in the glass, would teach her an *honest* lesson. *That* can no longer flatter, but she never now beholds it. Not one trace of even *prettiness* remaining—all ghastly expression, and sad discolouration!!

"Macbeth," xiv. 1, 123.

Sally, writing the same day to Miss Bird, tells her how Maria had been removed in a Sedan chair from Mrs. Pennington's to a lodging-house on the opposite side of the square, and had borne the exertion better than was expected. "She is now," Sally continues, "entirely confin'd to her own room, and yesterday could not leave her bed. My Mother and I sit by her all day; she takes great quantities of laudanum, which keep her in a continual stupor. I read to her by her desire almost constantly, for tho' she does not know what I read for five minutes together, she likes the sound while she is dozeing upon her pillow." Nevertheless "she is quite ignorant of her danger, nor does she seem to know she is in a Consumption, but thinks it some nervous spasmodic complaint which may be tedious, but not fatal."

MR. LAWRENCE *to* MRS. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, 3rd Oct.*]

I beg your pardon for the mad reproach of yesterday. I went, full of infatuated hope, to Mrs. Twiss's, and from thence to Mr. Kemble's, where I was undeceiv'd by Mrs. S.'s letter; but the shock was sudden, and, before reason had returned, I had written.

I submit to the terrible affliction of your letter as well as I can. You tell me much, *hide more*. Kind and wise in you, but ineffectual. I was never more alive than at this moment, and can guess at a dark hint with all the accuracy of guilt. I have never believ'd that Maria's nature was unrelenting;

and when you tell that I am awarded Christian forgiveness, I receive it as indisputable fact ; for I could believe it, had I violated her person, and struck at her very life. A wretch at the gallows would have had it.

But now of me and Maria, now be eternal silence. Only, Madam, still write. You know what I mean, that I will no more have my name mentioned to her. If I could gain from her the avowal of a sister's remembrance of me, and it cost her one pang, I would not seek it. This decision is somewhat late, and so is everything of virtue in the man who now writes to you. It comes when I can gain nothing, and is, therefore, exceedingly well-tim'd!

I believe you think, my dear Mrs. Pennington, that the impression of gloom upon my mind will be lasting ; but, believe me, it will very soon vanish. I see a smile upon your countenance at the gravity of this truth, that stops my wise reflections upon the lightness of human sorrows. I deserve the rebuke. My grief is in strict propriety. "*Some weep in perfect justice to the dead, as conscious all their love is in arrear.*"

In a few days, I suppose, all Maria's sufferings will be at an end, and she will go where infancy and age are, but *rarely manhood*. The whole of woman's life may be said to be one course of innocence. Your virtues your own, and whatever seem vices, grafted on them by the devilism of man. —And why a Devil?

Mr. Kemble is very much afflicted for Maria, and Mrs. Kemble equally so ; but the former with

more delicacy, which dear Miss Siddons will readily believe. How is she—Sally?

There were great illuminations here last night for the Victory, and every gloomy spirit was ferreted out of his hole.

Dear, dear Mrs. Siddons! She must be worn to nothing. I am almost thinking of writing to her.—Adieu, ever-valued friend!

THOS. LAWRENCE.

“Mr. Kemble” was Mrs. Siddons’ eldest brother, John Philip, with whom Lawrence was always on very intimate and friendly terms, painting him in most of his principal characters. He appeared for the first time at Drury Lane in 1783, as Hamlet, and remained there for nineteen years, during which he appeared in over 120 parts. At this time he was acting as Manager of that House, from which he did not finally retire till 1803, when he became part-proprietor of Covent Garden. His wife, who is mentioned at the close of the letter, was a daughter of Hopkins, the Drury Lane Prompter. Her first husband, William Brereton, who was, like herself, a member of Garrick’s company, died in 1787, in which year she became Mrs. Kemble. She is described by Genest as “pretty but not very capable”; a verdict which is borne out by Lawrence’s portrait of her.

As the battle of the Nile had been fought two months before this letter was written, August 1 and 2, the “great illuminations” might not, at first sight, appear to be connected with Nelson’s great victory. But taking into consideration the



MRS. J. P. KEMBLE

slowness of the methods of communication, and the length of time which must have elapsed before the despatches could be received, or full accounts have been made public, the rejoicings were not, perhaps, quite so belated as might appear.

Mr. LAWRENCE to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[Postmark, 4 Oct.]

You are a very fine creature to let nature have done with her resentments in you at this trying moment. Hereafter you may rise in my mind wholly as an image of comfort and of peace, unaccompanied by those afflicting thoughts that now have banished both. My intelligence was from Mrs. Twiss. An expression was mentioned. "She wished her Mother to be with her: to look on her was now her only pleasure, *and that would soon cease!*" In the great subject your letter dwells on, it is impossible but I must feel as you do. *We know that she cannot be without suspicion of the dreadful fact; tho' endeavouring to hide it from herself.* Many, many perhaps, of her hours of silence are fill'd with terror, gloom, and uncertainty. "Yet if I am in this state, sure it would be mention'd to me." May she not cheat her fears thus? But who shall judge? You who are on the spot, but still in silence. Well, it must rest so. Nature, then, still claims its usual sustenance, and the difficulty is in swallowing. From her weakness, and the cough, it cannot be otherwise. *Is the pulse regular?*

Pray ask Mrs. S. and Sally about Miss Hughes's case. She is fast recovering.

Perhaps, from what I have said, you may imagine that hope is still lingering. No! no! for a moment the mind may dwell on miracles, when only a miracle can give it peace,—but the fancy is too idle to last, and the dreadful certainty resumes its place. This is the case with me. You see, however, from the general character of this letter, that I cannot be indifferent to the tender solicitude that others express for me. Shame prevents me. What is due to all and to myself. Heaven bless you! If you can, a thousand grateful remembrances to my beloved Mrs. Siddons for the effort she made for me. An humble sigh or two for my Mistress!—Dear, dear friend, adieu,

THOS. LAWRENCE.

Has Miss Lee call'd to see poor Maria?

Mr. LAWRENCE *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

I see and am prepared for all. The last attacks are then begun, and soon this astonishing remedy itself will be powerless. "Yesterday evening was dreadful." How? For God sake, when these terrors come, let me have them in detail. Don't think of the shock, or gloomy effect upon my mind; think only that at this moment uncertainty, ignorance, are the things that are insupportable. Call it madness, or what you please, but were my wishes gratified not a groan or look, not (of all the most

fearful) the ghastly smile, should be hid from me. I would know *everything*.

I had written a letter to-day, I am ashamed to say it was abusing the Miss Thrales. A great injustice, but I had fancied them flaunting about in all their gaiety, and dropping in on the sufferer, and quite shock'd at her bad looks! I had enough, however, of candour in me to be disgusted with my own spleen, and late, when the Postman was going round, tore the letter. I NOW LOVE THEM! for I hear they flew down on the wings of love and pity to have a last glance at their dear Maria! These mannish women have sometimes much heart about them, and while they feel for others, may be pardon'd for thinking for themselves in trifles.

Sat^y.

What an affecting letter you have sent me! how sad, yet how consoling! From what afflicting sources may we sometimes derive peace! for I cannot tell you how strangely my mind is sooth'd by your intelligence. Were you present? But if you were not, you heard it from truth itself. How great, and like herself, was the going on *instantly* with the subject!

Yes, sorrow must purify the mind—sorrow like ours at the death-bed of the innocent. I think I could soon be worthy of the bliss she is going to. But how long will this impression last? I hope long enough. I hope Maria will not have died in vain. But is she doomed now to die? I am excessively anxious to know what is said to Mrs. J. Kemble's account of Miss Hughes. A very, very

extraordinary case: like Maria, given over by Physicians, not deem'd capable of bearing the journey, and coming it in six days, yet now recovering. Mr. S. knew her when almost at the worst. You will tell me, dearest friend! You, who give up your time and your heart to me, *because you know mine is better'd by the intercourse.*

Did the Miss Thrales, good, worthy creatures (why, when they are such, did I call them mannish?)—did they prepare themselves sufficiently for the interview? but doubtless they did. You, and that dear Woman, and SALLY took care of that.

I won't write yet, since you fear it; but there's no fear of Mr. S. getting it *if I enclose it to you.*

Now I have a neglect to accuse you of—for these four last letters you have not mention'd my dear friend. *Be silent in your next, and I shall know that she is again ill.* Did Maria suffer her from her bedside? She cannot, and well may that selfishness be pardon'd her.

Mr. Kemble has just called here. He is extremely kind and friendly. He came to tell me of Mr. Siddons' letter, and that Maria now *literally eats nothing.* This I knew to be a mistake, but dared not tell him so, nor hint that I have any other sources of intelligence than those in Town.

Indeed your friends (for now I recollect that they are so, and beg your pardon for that offensive expression), show themselves in this affectionate solicitude very worthy and admirable creatures. Even I, outcast from this sweet girl's heart, still think myself almost entitled to offer them my gratitude.

MRS. KEMBLE has called here. Is it indeed then true that for four days she has had no sustenance? None! Mrs. S.'s letter says so.

I teize you too long, God, God, bless you!

THOS. LAWRENCE.

So anxious now to take anything?

The Miss Thrales, to whom Lawrence so frequently recurs in this letter, were the elder daughters of Mrs. Piozzi by her first husband, Henry Thrale, Esq., of Streatham Park. Deeply resenting their mother's second marriage, and being no longer dependent on her, they had set up a separate establishment, only Cecilia, the youngest of the sisters, who was under age, being left in her charge. The breach had however been healed some years before this date, and though they did not again reside in their mother's house, they were on friendly terms with her and Mr. Piozzi. She writes to Mrs. Pennington in 1795 that they proposed to winter in Clifton, and hoped to make her acquaintance, adding that "the Siddonses and they are grown quite intimate." This independent and roving mode of life probably accounts for the epithet of "mannish" with which Lawrence labels them.

It will be gathered from Lawrence's remark about his letter to Mrs. Siddons that her husband was now at Clifton, having been summoned in anticipation of a speedy termination of Maria's sufferings: and before this letter was penned the end had come. She died on the 7th of October, and three days later was buried in the old Parish

Church of Clifton (St. Andrew's), now demolished. The oval marble tablet erected to her memory in the chancel is in the West Porch of the present church, and bears the following inscription :—

IN THE VAULT OF THIS CHURCH LIES INTERRED

MARIA SIDDONS

Who dep^t this life Oct. 7th, 1798

AGED 19

“Early, bright, transient, chaste as morning dew,
She sparkled, was exhaled, and went to Heaven.”¹—YOUNG.

The impression produced by her death, not merely on the intimate friends to whom she was endeared by the sweetness of her disposition, but on the wider circle of her acquaintance, is thus summed up by Mrs. Piozzi in a letter to Mrs. Pennington : “I am quite confident that if Admiral Nelson by his prodigious Victory could purchase Peace for Europe, he might, in four years’ time, die in his own House, and not be *half as much* regretted as is the lovely object of your late attention. Every letter I receive from every creature is full of her Praise, and breathes an unfeigned sorrow for her loss. Virtue, well tried through many a refining Fire, Learning, lost to the World she illuminated, Courage, taken from the Island protected by her Arms, excite not so much sorrow as Maria Siddons, represented to every Imagination as sweet and gentle and

¹ “Night Thoughts,” v. 600.

soothing, as *young* in short,—for in youth lies every charm.” A little later she touches, with much insight, on the different ways in which her parents were affected by her death. “A Father’s sensations of loss could not abate so readily as that of our transcendent and now doubly dear Mrs. Siddons. *She* will return to the duties and cares of life, and in them, as in her own pure heart, will find a med’cine for her grief. But *his* expectations from a daughter’s Beauty, his purposed pride in her charms, which ’tis now clear she possess’d, are blasted in the most incurable manner. I am sorry for Mr. Siddons from my very soul.”

As soon as all was over, Mrs. Pennington, in obedience to Lawrence’s desire expressed in his last letter to have all the details, however painful, of the closing scenes of Maria’s life, sat down and penned for him the account which follows.

Mrs. PENNINGTON to Mr. LAWRENCE.

Monday, 8th Octor. 1798.

Dear, afflicted, and unfortunate Being, who attack, agitate, interest, and *distract* all that are intimately connected with you, what hard requisitions do you exact, and what a task do you impose on me, when you adjure me to tell you “*everything*,” to detail “*every*” scene of a Drama, so full of matter and pathos, that every hour might have furnished a volume.

If ever creature was operated on by the immediate power and Spirit of God, it was Maria Siddons, in the last forty-eight hours of her life.

On Friday evening, about seven o'clock, Mrs. Siddons fainted on the Sofa, which was placed close to the bedside, exhausted by excessive fatigue. Our tears, and Mr. Siddons's most earnest prayers, prevailed on her to retire to bed. She had never undress'd but twice from the day of her arrival;—and Sally, who had not been permitted to sit up by night at all, on account of the peculiarity of her constitution, *insisted* upon supplying her Mother's place, which she consented to her doing, on condition that *I* was able to accompany her:—for otherwise this tender and judicious Parent thought some scene might take place too powerful for the feelings of *both* her darlings. You may be sure *I* readily assented, though really ill, and much exhausted;—and well it was *I* did so. About four in the morning a *great alteration* took place. She became excessively agitated, and entreated me to send for Dr. Nott, and call up her Mother. The former *I* did, the latter *I* evaded, knowing by her pulse, which *I* had made myself well acquainted with, that no *immediate* crisis was at hand. The Physician stay'd about an hour, and left her at ease and composed. She then renew'd with me the conversation that *I* inform'd you she had held with her Mother. She told me she “now saw the *truth*,” and conjured *me* not to attempt concealing it from her. She insisted on knowing “*what* the Faculty thought.” *I told her*. She thanked me most gracefully, and firmly assured me, “she was more composed and comfortable than she had been through her illness; for now she should no more be teized with vain expectations from useless

means." She spoke of her hopes, of her fears,—but those, she said, were founded only on the recollection of that *excessive vanity*, which had made the creature too much her object, and "she trusted in the mercy of her Creator, that the great alteration which had taken place" (looking at her poor hands), "and her severe sufferings, would be a sufficient expiation." She spoke as never girl of nineteen spoke, or thought; it was inspiration of the Divinity, who permitted her to live till her nature was purified and perfected.

But how am I to proceed? How tell you that *all* which you *fear'd* HAS HAPPENED.

In her *dying* accents, her last solemn injunction was given and repeated some hours afterwards in the presence of Mrs. Siddons. She call'd her Sister—said how dear, how sweet, how *good* she was—that one only care for her welfare pressed on her mind. "Promise me, my Sally, *never* to be the wife of Mr. Lawrence. I *cannot* BEAR to *think* of *your* being so." Sally evaded the promise; not but that a thousand recent circumstances had made up her mind to the sacrifice, but that she did not like the positive tie. She would have evaded the subject also, and said, "dear Maria, think of nothing that agitates you at this time." She INSISTED that it did not agitate her, but that it was necessary to her repose to pursue the subject. Sally still evaded the promise, but said: "Oh! it is *impossible*," meaning that she cou'd *answer* for *herself*, but which Maria understood and construed into an impossibility of the event *ever* taking place, and replied: "I am content, my dear Sister—I am

satisfied." The moment she saw her Mother, she told her that her mind was perfectly made up, and talked with her in a most wonderful manner on her approaching change. She was extremely solicitous to know *when* it might be supposed to take place, and was anxiously inquisitive about time, but check'd herself, and said "perhaps that was not right."

She desired to have Prayers read, and followed her angelic mother, who read them, and who appear'd like a blessed spirit ministering about her, with the utmost clearness, accuracy, and fervor. She then turn'd the conversation to *you*, and said: "*That man* told you, Mother, he had destroy'd my Letters. *I* have no opinion of his honor, and I entreat you to demand them;" nor would be easy till she had given the strongest assurances that she wou'd use every means in her power to procure them from you, or a confirmation that they were destroy'd. Strong and delicate were the reasons she alledged for this request. She then said, Sally *had promised her* NEVER to think of an union with Mr. Lawrence, and appeal'd to her Sister to confirm it, who, quite overcome, reply'd: "I did *not* promise, dear, dying Angel; but I WILL, and DO, if you require it." "Thank you, Sally; my dear Mother—Mrs. Pennington—*bear witness.* Sally, give me your hand—you promise never to be his wife; Mother—Mrs. Pennington—lay your hands on hers" (we did so).—"You understand? bear witness." We bowed, and were speechless. "Sally, sacred, sacred be this promise"—stretching out her hand, and pointing her forefinger—"REMEMBER ME, and God bless you!"

And what, after this, my friend, can you say to SALLY Siddons? She has entreated me to give you this detail—to say that the impression is sacred, is indelible—that it cancels all former bonds and engagements—that she entreats you to submit, and not to prophane this awful season by a murmur.

If you can sanctify passion into friendship, still you may be dear to their hearts, and, at some future time, but even that far distant, enjoy their society. If you *cannot* do this, never approach, or, if you can help it, think of them more. I think Sally will not lightly or easily, if ever, make another election; but *yours* she NEVER *can*, never WILL be. She is wonderfully well, and wonderfully supported; feeling all that she can, and all that she ought. Mrs. Siddons is fortitude and tenderness united and personified. Mr. Siddons is a most estimable and amiable Being—all the father, the husband, and the good man on this trying occasion. Miss Th——es are very amiable. Ah, my friend! into what *mis-taken* conclusions does your impetuous mind continually hurry you! Their only motive was to see, to comfort, and to weep over their dying friend. How feminine, how sweet, was their deportment! They are returned to Town, but did not stir till all was over—their kind hearts full of their beloved Maria, and their bright eyes dimm'd with tears. They *were* duly prepared, but the shock was excessive. Yet this dear, faded creature, in her latter hours, resumed a grace and beauty that in true interest surpassed her most blooming days. Had you seen her Saturday evening, a few hours previous to her dissolution, as she sat up supported

by the raised pillows, lay her hand on her breast and bow to her Mother,—who said: “My Love, there is a heavenly expression in your countenance”—saying: “Do you think so?” at the same time *looking round*, and smiling graciously upon us, as if *she felt* a happy consciousness of the truth—you could never have forgotten it. Oh! it was a moment that the Painter or the Sculptor with all their art could never reach! Many such we had in the course of that day and evening. And her last attitude! reclining her poor head on the pillow, which she had never done for a minute together for several days and nights (such was her extreme restlessness), was beauty and grace itself!! Such a serenity! Such a divine composure! She took leave of us all with tenderness unbounded, but without the least agitation. When addressing her father with acknowledgments of his great kindness and indulgence to her through her illness, and on all occasions, she said: “Think what my sufferings must be, when I can wish to leave such a family as mine! yet I *do* wish to be released.” She thanked the Servants for their trouble and attention, and beg’d they would forget and forgive any sort of petulance or impatience she had at any time expressed. *Her Mother! Her Sally!* were words for ever on her lips, and murmured to the last moment in her accents. From the time her incomparable Mother arrived, no asperity, no impatience, ever escaped her. Her soul seem’d all harmonised by the presence of that admirable woman. That mother, who is, as you say, “*Truth itself*,” can tell you many surprising and many grievous things.

Maria once told her she cou'd not think of your marrying her Sister without horror!!—that she *sickened* at your very name! We both urged that she had expressed a *different* sentiment respecting the probability of your being united to Sally. "Aye," she replied, "that might be in some moment of languor, when she sought to find happiness *out of herself*, but this was her fixed sentiment and *real* feeling on the subject." At another time she said: "Oh! my dear Mother, there will be no peace but in breaking all ties with that man. He has reduced you to skin and bone, and been my death."

I dread the conflict of the passions in such a mind as yours; but, my dear friend, this is the proper season to obtain the mastery over them—do so, and let not "Maria Siddons have died in vain." How I love Mr. Kemble for his attention to you at this time! but do you not feel that it is to the *lover of Maria*? What do you conceive would be *his* feelings if he *cou'd* think it was to that of *her Sister*? I wish to God *I* were *your* Sister, that I might be privileged to offer you every possible consolation. I wou'd say: "Come here when the family leave us." But *what* cou'd it do for you? and my very soul wants rest, which I must seek for in change of scene.

All that *I* tell you may be depended on as veritable fact, neither misrepresented nor exaggerated. I was never absent but while I took a few hours necessary repose, or wrote a short letter to you. It is very true she took scarcely any nourishment for the last three or four days—nothing indeed but

medicine, and even the Laudanum fail'd at last. Her pains were almost incessant, but her intellects seemed to gain strength and clearness. Bright and luminous indeed were her short intervals of ease! never to be forgotten by those who witness'd her looks and words in those awful moments! At one time, under excessive oppression and suffering, she prayed with VEHEMENCE: "Now, now," she said, "let it be now!" but correcting herself, she added: "That's not the way;" and dropping her sweet eyes, and folding her hands meekly, she continued: "Lord, I *beseech* Thee to release me!"

We have read the death-bed scenes of Clarissa and Eloisa, drawn as they are by the hands of genius, and embellish'd with all that skilful and powerful fancy could give them to touch the imagination; believe me, they are faint sketches compared with those last hours, that have enriched the memories of us who attended Maria Siddons, where nature supplied touches that art cou'd never reach. The case of that Miss Hughes you mention must differ widely from our dear Maria's, who had suffered a waste and emaciation that no power of nature could have restored. When I look'd at her *cold remains* a few hours before she was shut for ever from our sight, conceive my astonishment on beholding the *exact resemblance* of HER MOTHER, GROWN OLD! even to seventy years!! A strong character, an expression of divinely solemn and grave composure, but not one trace of *youth* remaining.



ANST. 5. 1

Miss (S. W.) Siddons.
1800.
By Sir Thomas Lawrence

Tuesday Night.

To-morrow morning the *last* sad ceremony is to be perform'd at Clifton Church. In the evening the mourning family go to Bath, on their way to Town.

I am *desired* to restore you the enclosed Pledges. Oh! receive them as the sad and solemn occasion demands, with resignation to that Power who directs all for the best, and for wise ends appoints us these trials.

Thursday.

They are gone!! and I feel a desolation, a *vacancy*, no words can express! Dear Maria, who never slept latterly, was always most anxious for the *dawn of day*. Is it too fanciful to say, I have had a sweet sort of satisfaction in observing the uncommonly *fine* and *brilliant* weather we have had since we lost our Angel? Not a cloud to obstruct the passage of her pure spirit through boundless Æther!! May every possible image of comfort rise up to calm *your* mind! It is but poor consolation to offer you my constant friendship and tender sympathy; but if you will accept the gift, and can bind it with soothing efficacy to your heart, it is sincerely yours.

P. S. PENNINGTON.

Mrs. Pennington, her emotions deeply stirred by the affecting scenes she so feelingly describes, may, perhaps, have believed that the narrative of them, fatal though it was to his dearest hopes, would produce the effect she anticipated on Lawrence's

mind. If so, her usually sound judgment was, for once, at fault. The result of her letter on such a temperament as his may be easily imagined. The handwriting, no less than the wording of his reply, betrays a mind trembling for the moment on the verge of insanity.

Mr. LAWRENCE *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, 13th Oct. 1798.*]
CHARLES STREET.

It is only my Hand that shakes, not my Mind.

I have play'd deeply for her, and you think she will still escape me. I'll tell you a Secret. *It is possible she may. Mark the End.*

You have all play'd your parts admirably!!!

If the scene you have so accurately describ'd is mention'd by you to *one Human Being*, I will pursue your name with execration.

The revulsion of feeling with regard to Lawrence produced by this extraordinary epistle in the mind of Mrs. Pennington, exhausted as she was by the fatigues of protracted nursing, and overwrought by the scenes she had lately passed through, is clearly shown in her reply. The threat of returning his future letters was not strictly carried out, for two attempts on the part of Mr. Lawrence to renew the correspondence are preserved; but it does not appear that she ever returned any answer to them.

It is only my hand that takes
nothing mind.

I have (say) deeply for as
and you think the will still even
me. I'll tell you a secret ~~it is~~
possible one may. ~~the~~
I

You have all played your
parts admirably! 2. 2. 2. 2. 2.

If the Stone you read was
described in method by you to one
Therain being I will give you
more with execution

Mrs. PENNINGTON to Mr. LAWRENCE.

Monday, 15th Oct.

I THANK YOU,—you have made a *Grateful* return for a long and painful task, imposed on me by YOURSELF, which I have endured patiently, and discharged with integrity, and the truest, tenderest sympathy.

From all uneasiness from that source you very kindly relieve me.

The mind that is uncorrected under such circumstances, and which feels only for itself, deserves not a thought.

I deign not to reply to your unmanly *threat*.

Any further letters from your hand will be return'd unopen'd.

P. S. PENNINGTON.

Meanwhile Mrs. Siddons writes from Bath on her way back to town, already roused from the first abandonment of her grief by the necessity for taking precautions against the scandal-mongers of her acquaintance, considering Lawrence's probable course of action, and keeping the whole story secret from her husband.

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

BATH, 9 o'clock, Wednesday Night.

MY BELOVED FRIEND,—I know you will be glad to hear that I am tolerably compos'd, tho' your dear image (never so interesting as this day), all drown'd in tears as I took the last parting glance

of you, has accompanied me all the way : *dear, dear soul!* you should always wear Black. Oh! thou art not for the fashion of these times. Pray, pray go to Mr. Humphreys immediately, and try to wear off the keenness of a sorrow your delicate frame is so little able to endure. I will not ask you to forget the sufferings nobly, sweetly encounter'd for the friend who, in that case, must be forgotten too. No, you will not forget, but you will subdue them; and they shall live to be the sacred bond that unites us *till sorrow can have no dominion over us.*

Write to your correspondent immediately, and remember by the same post to send me the transcript of your letter! Do not let Mrs. Nugent be informed of the interesting circumstances which occur'd on Saturday—she talks a great deal, and the world is fond of any tale that feeds its appetite for mischief. If she takes a fit of reprobation into her head, she will move heaven and earth to ruin that poor young man's future prospects, and she has it in her power to do a great deal *for*, and, of course, *against.* With *Justice* let us remember *Mercy.* With Mr. Whalley I lift up my voice and say, "Spare not him," but have compassion on his *reputation*, or the blest work of reformation your counsels are likely to effect may be frustrate, and he may think it labour lost to aim at it.

My precious Sally's breath is still a little affected, but I hope this evil will pass by! Direct your letter to Sally Briggs, lest it should fall into improper hands. And now God bless you, dearest, best, most adorable of creatures! S. SIDDONS.

Query, whether you shou'd promise him that Sally will make no other election? This hint is merely for your caution—you know with such a character one must speak by the card—and I would shield you from further trouble on this unhappy subject. *God knows*, dear creature, you have had too much already!

The Mr. Whalley mentioned above, and whose name frequently recurs later on, was the Rev. Thomas Sedgwick Whalley, D.D., Rector of Hagworthingham, and Prebendary of Wells. He had at this time a house in Bath, where Mrs. Siddons frequently visited him, and where she was no doubt staying when this letter was written. He was an intimate friend also of Mrs. Piozzi and Miss Seward, the "Swan of Lichfield," many of whose letters are printed in his journals. These consist mainly of accounts of his wanderings on the Continent; for he was a great traveller, and wrote lengthy accounts of his experiences with somewhat turgid descriptions of scenery to Mrs. Pennington, who was a cousin of his first wife. He dabbled a little in poetry, and once, as will appear later, essayed drama. In his later years he is described as "the true picture of a sensible, well informed and educated, polished, old, well-beneficed, nobleman's and gentleman's house-frequenting, literary, chess-playing divine."

It may be presumed that Sally Briggs was Mrs. Siddons' maid, who would take care that letters addressed to her, but meant for her mistress, reached the latter direct, without passing through

“improper hands,”—*i.e.* those of Mr. Siddons, who might thus have learnt the story of Lawrence’s courtship so sedulously concealed from him.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark*, LONDON, 13 Oct. 1798.]

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The sad moments of family condolence past, I take the first opportunity of telling you that we arrived safe at home; but poor Sally’s malady was not to be diverted. Her breath grew more and more oppress’d from the time I wrote to you from Bath; all day yesterday she was extremely ill indeed. I hope, however, the violence of the fit is past! To-day she breathes more freely. My time, as you may imagine, is completely taken up in my attendance on this precious creature that is left me, and I snatch a few moments from perpetual occupation merely to give you this account. Of our wretched friend I hear only that he is miserable. May your wise and sweet counsels operate to soothe and purify his mind! I have received, and thank you for your beautiful letter to him. I believe I told you that I had written to her Father to beg he would allow Patty Wilkinson to come and spend the winter with us; I have had no answer from him, but surely he cannot refuse me at such a time. My dear Sally will want a companion in many hours of my necessary absence; but she still sweetly assures me that with me she cannot be unhappy. It shall be the study of her Mother’s life to drive all care and sorrow from her. Write to me soon, and tell

me you have recover'd all the pains and sorrows
you have endur'd for your ever grateful and affe^{te}

S. SIDDONS.

Remember me most kindly to Miss Lee, the
Whalleys, and your own dear house. Imagine all
kind things from *mine*.

So far no news of Lawrence had reached Mrs. Siddons from Clifton, though she had seen the copy of the account of Maria's last hours sent him by Mrs. Pennington, the "beautiful letter" of which she speaks. That this was not a merely complimentary phrase is shown in rather a curious way by a letter quoted by Campbell, written about this time by Mrs. Siddons to her enthusiastic admirer and particular friend, Mrs. Fitz-Hugh. In this she speaks of Maria's death-bed as "far surpassing the imaginations of Rousseau and Richardson in their *Héloïse* and *Clarissa Harlowe*, for hers was, I believe, from the immediate inspiration of the Divinity." The idea of the first clause, and the wording of the second, are both clearly taken from Mrs. Pennington's account to Lawrence.

Patty Wilkinson was the daughter of Mrs. Siddons' old friend Tate Wilkinson, to whom she had written in May, as quoted by Campbell: "If you are the man I take you for, you will not refuse me this favour. It would *indeed* be a great comfort to *all* of us if you would allow our dear Patty to come to us on our return to Town in the Autumn and stay with us a few months. I am sure it would do our poor Maria so much good." She came,

however, later on, as will be seen from succeeding letters, as a companion to Sally, was treated as a child of the house, and lived with Mrs. Siddons till the close of her days.

Mrs. Pennington's reply is written from Shirehampton, a little village near the mouth of the Bristol Avon, where, in the house of her friend Mr. Humphreys, she was seeking the repose she so much needed for body and mind after the trying scenes she had lately passed through.

Mrs. PENNINGTON *to* Mrs. SIDDONS.

SHIREHAMPTON, *Monday,*
15th Oct. 1798.

MY BELOV'D FRIEND,—Your kind letter consoles and comforts me. I fear'd our sweet Sally wou'd not escape the threaten'd attack, and have only to pray that it may not prove severe, and that she may soon shake it off. I know, amidst your various avocations, you will not fail to give me the satisfaction of hearing she has done so, as soon as it is in your power. We are receiving every friendly attention and mark of kind hospitality from our agreeable and worthy friend Mr. Humphreys at his pretty and comfortable cottage, where nothing is omitted that can soothe my mind, and banish from it a scene of sorrow which has made a very deep impression on my spirits. I weep much less than when you were with me. The sight of you all dilated and softened my heart, which, I think, feels much less at ease since I have lost you. This sad *vacancy*, which I dreaded so much, very heavily

oppresses me ; but I dare say all will be well again in time. At present my *nights* are worse than my days, and I have this morning received a letter from that *wretched man* not likely to calm my slumbers. I pray God preserve *your* peace, my dearest Friend, from the attacks that I fear it will be assailed by from that quarter. You have had so much to agitate you, and your repose is so precious to me, that I would sink this odious letter in oblivion were it right to do so ; but it appears indispensably necessary to me that you shou'd see his letter, that you may be guarded from the dangers that threaten you, and, by timely seeing, avoid them if possible. This letter has the stamp of a DARK and DESPERATE character, to which I do not *chuse* to fix the *proper* name. As far as relates to myself, I brave and despise it, and I hope it will meet in you a *firmness*, proof against all his arts of *intimidation*, for on them he has always rested his hopes, nay, certainty, of success. It is critical to *advise* under such circumstances, but I am much inclined to think *I* should at all hazards put the affair at once into the hands of Mr. Siddons, and trust to his candour and good sense. I should also consult with Mr. Kemble. It is necessary, in my opinion, that Sally shou'd be placed under the protection of those who are naturally inclined and able to afford it her. While *he* thinks he has ONLY the *timidity* of WOMEN to operate on, and to oppose him, there is no saying *what* he may not *attempt*. He says—Oh ! what a shocking mode of expressing himself!—that he “has play'd DEEPLY for her,” and he *intimates* that she *may* possibly “*still escape*”

him—but shall not if ANY thing he CAN do will prevent it. *What a wretch!* My nerves and my nature shudder at this man. What will you do to save yourself, and above all, dear, dear Sally, from him? Let me have his *diabolical* letter at a future day. God only knows what occasion I may have for it. I send you a copy of my reply. By this time, I fear, *you* may have heard from him. It is worth remark that my mind has, all along, anticipated something of *this* sort. I was therefore half prepared for it; yet I own I am greatly shock'd and agitated. I thought it very probable that he would impute the whole to *fabrification* on *our* parts, and write a taunting, insolent answer; but I did not expect anything so *audacious* and *horrible*. Take good care how you act, my belov'd Friend. I am strongly for advising with Mr. Kemble, and laying all before Mr. Siddons, and trusting to his judgment. But, for God's sake, follow the dictates of your *own* upright and excellent mind, and, at all events, be tender of *my name*, for there is nothing *I* may not fear from his malice and vengeance. Yet, as it may serve the cause to have it *known* he has written *me* such a letter, and that I have sent it to *you*, I do not in that case desire to be screen'd: indeed he cannot possibly suppose I should do otherwise. And, on second thoughts, think not of *me* at all, but *do whatever is right*, for it is this system of slavish fear that has always kept *you* in *check*, on one person's account or another, and given him power that he has used so ill. What can *he* do to *ME*? I defy and despise him too much *really* to fear all his boasted powers of violence.



JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE
AS CORIOLANUS

I cou'd wish dear Sally's mind kept quiet ; yet surely she *ought* to know of this *outrage*, which I shou'd imagine must cast him from *her* heart for *ever*. Much am I mistaken if there is not more wounded *Interest* than *Love* at the bottom of all this. *It is desperate*, because his FORTUNES *are so*. Love is a more generous passion ; and this is not a time for rage and malice of so *dark* a cast as the *last* passage in his letter bears towards ME. Was his *heart right*, his mind must be subdued and corrected at THIS time, and could be open only to the impressions of self-reproach, regret, and *sorrow*.

God bless you ! my mind is sadly troubled at this moment for you. All the strength and nobleness of your character will be call'd for, my dear Friend, on this occasion. May the Power that sends these trials give you spirit and firmness to combat them, and obtain the victory. Leave me not in suspense of anything that passes, but write me all.

I am in a humour to torment myself. Is there any coldness in the letter I received from you to-day ? Ah ! no. At least I am sure you felt none in writing it. All here send you their kindest, truest regards. Mr. Humphreys desires to be particularly mention'd. Direct to the Wells as usual. Love me always, for I shall ever be most faithfully and affectionately yours, P. S. P.

Kindest love to Mr. Siddons and dear Sally.

On the most mature reflection I charge you not to be delicate respecting me.

At this point Sally Siddons appears as Mrs. Pennington's correspondent, and gradually takes the place previously occupied by her mother. She had been shown Lawrence's last wild letter, which had produced its expected effect, and for a time at least, she recoiled in dread from the glimpse of the storm-tossed soul which it afforded her.

MISS SIDDONS *to* MRS. PENNINGTON.

LONDON, *October 17th.*

My dear and kind friend has not, I am sure, for a moment accus'd me of neglect ; she knows the cause of my silence, she knows that my heart is incapable of being insensible or forgetful for an instant of the thousand kindnesses which must be for ever alive in my memory. You will rejoice to find I am again pretty well, and able to mend pens, and write letters. Oh ! my dear Mrs. P., my health is indeed returning, but my mind continues sadly, sadly depress'd by the recollection of the late mournful scenes. I hope and believe that a little time, and the chearful society of our friends, will dissipate the gloom in which I am at present envelop'd. Your letter this morning to my Mother, with that enclos'd, have shocked me extremely. I did indeed hope that our Maria's death would have had a very different effect. How unpardonably ungrateful it is in him to write to *you* in such a style !—to you, who have behav'd towards him with such tenderness and indulgence, that even *I* have wonder'd at your goodness ! But indeed, I seriously believe he is, at times, *quite mad* ; there is no other

possibility of accounting for his conduct. Poor, wretched creature! let him inflict still farther torments on those who love and are interested for him, *he will still be the most tormented.*

Do not fear upon my account, dearest friend! where can there be any danger, since I am myself more unwilling to put myself in his power than any of my relations can be? AM I NOT BOUND BY A PROMISE, THE MOST SOLEMN, THE MOST SACRED,—is not that sufficient to preserve me, even should my own treacherous heart dictate a thought in his favour! *But that it does not*, even when I thought of him as unhappy but resign'd I did not regret my promise given. But now, his shocking violence at such a time, to such a friend, has thrown him more from my heart than anything else in the world:—*It may be love, but such love as I never wish to inspire; I fly with HORROR from such a passion!* My Mother has, no doubt, told you what she means to do. I believe she intends telling my Father, though, perhaps, not immediately. Write to me, my belov'd, my much valued friend; oh! be always to me what you have been! To you, after my Mother, I shall ever look for counsel and support,—you have loved me for the few merits I may possess, you have been tenderly indulgent to a weakness which I have not hid from you. I will not say *that weakness shall never return*; but if it does, it shall be confided only to you, and you shall advise, and love, and pity me. Oh! you can do it so sweetly, and never will your kind heart be shut to the sorrows of your Sally! We cannot, you know, quite conquer all our *feelings*, but virtue

and reason may regulate our *conduct*, and, with the help of heaven, I fear not for myself in that respect; whatever I may *feel* I will *act* AS I HAVE PROMIS'D.

My sweet friend and companion, Dorothy, will not return to Town these three weeks; this is a great grief to me. I hope your mind is every hour regaining that tranquillity and ease we have so sadly broken in upon. I think all day, and dream all night (till the horrors of my visions wake me, and that has been my case since I left you), of my Maria dying, dead;—every quarter of an hour I am starting from some dreadful dream!! I hope these distressing recollections will become less painful. I must exert myself, in the day at least, for my dear Mother's sake. Adieu, dear, dear Mrs. P.! with a heart fill'd with the warmest love and gratitude, believe me ever yours most faithfully and affectionately,

S. M. S.

Pray remember me most kindly to dear Mr. Pennington and Mrs. Weston—are they both well?

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[Postmark, LONDON, 17th Oct. 1798.]
Wednesday.

My dear, dear Soul! Oh, never for one moment think I can ever feel the least diminution of that affection for you that is grown *incorporate with my very existence*. You know that I have many and pressing calls upon my time and attention, and may not be as large upon the subject at *all* times as I

wish to be; but while I have life my heart will beat towards you with fervent love and increasing admiration.

I have, *at this time*, only time to tell you that Sally is well again, thank God! Of the infatuated creature, whose diabolical letter you have astonish'd me with this morning, I hear from Mr. and Mrs. Twiss, that after every species of frantic behaviour (which you yourself have borne so sweetly, and for the agitating effects of which you have met *so fit a return*—of course, if you have opened his letters, he has been upon his knees to you, BODY AND SOUL, for his unmanly outrage), for several days together, that he is now PERFECTLY COMPOSED, and determined, by a course of proper conduct, to deserve the blessing he hopes for. *I* wish him every good *but that*, for I am more and more convinc'd they would both be wretched. Dear Sally loves you with all her heart. I thought it right to show her that shocking letter. "If this is love, defend me from it!" were her words. She is shock'd at his behaviour to you. I wou'd follow your advice implicitly, but that Mrs. Kemble, with a thousand good qualities, is so fond of talking over other people's concerns, and that so indiscriminately, that it is no exaggeration to say this affair would be known in every Milliner's shop in Town, had she the least intimation of it. The confidence between Mr. S. and my Brother is unbounded, and I fear, were I to acquaint my Husband of it, there is no doubt of the forenam'd consequences. Mr. S. too, is, unhappily, so cold and repelling, that instead of tender sympathy I shou'd expect harsh words,

"unkind reproof, and looks that stab with coldness." Yet all this I wou'd and will *boldly encounter* the very moment that I see occasion. There is nothing to fear from Sally, you know, and *L.* is resolv'd to be *quiet* at present. Compose yourself, dear Creature! for we are all as much at peace as the nature of things will admit of. Send me a bit of thread the size for your Ring in your next letter. Accept our tenderest loves and gratitude, present us kindly to your fireside, and never doubt the faith of your own

S. SIDDONS.

They have begun to worry me about playing. I dread, yet wish, the time were come. Patty Wilkinson comes to us this week. God bless you!

But the storms in Lawrence's mind, however violent, subsided almost as quickly as they rose; and in a few days we find him writing a tentative note to Mrs. Pennington, to discover if perchance it were possible to obtain his pardon, regain her confidence, and renew their correspondence.

Mr. LAWRENCE *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

"Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? *Never Hamlet!* HIS MADNESS THEN." "And I have shot mine arrow o'er the House and hurt my Brother!"

This letter, if unanswered, was, at any rate, not returned as Mrs. Pennington had threatened.

Accordingly Lawrence was emboldened to make another and more decided attempt at explanation and reconciliation.

Mr. LAWRENCE *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

DEAR MADAM,—You would not have borne with me so far, if your heart cou'd not pardon the madness I have been guilty of, which, indeed, your letter was as certain of producing as any cause its unavoidable effect.

From your preceding letter, and the account of Maria's state of mind, I was led to expect the *very opposite* of the chilling fact you have announced to me, and it is no wonder that my excessive astonishment at it shou'd have generated suspicion.

My mind, however, is so far quieted by your intelligence, that Remorse is no longer its inhabitant. My crime, I thought, was to Tenderness—I cannot give its expiation to Revenge. I am, with the truest esteem, ever yours, THOS. LAWRENCE.

This letter, too, was read by Mrs. Pennington, instead of being returned unopened to the sender. But it would seem that she was firmly resolved to break off all relations with the artist, for no copy of her answer is preserved, which would certainly have been the case had she replied to it. Lawrence being convinced either from this rebuff, or from information conveyed by his friends, that the case was hopeless, desisted from his attempts, and from this point drops out of the correspondence.

Mrs. PENNINGTON to Mrs. SIDDONS.

SHIREHAMPTON, *Wednesday,*
17th Octr 1798.

MY BELOV'D FRIEND,—When will this restless and turbulent Spirit leave us at peace? And how is one to *understand*, and be prepared for, the quick and rapid transitions of such an *ever-changing* mind as his?

The enclosed has just reached me. I think it right to hasten it to you without a moment's delay. It breathes some symptoms of returning reason. I cannot say I comprehend the LAST sentence:—it may admit of *very different* constructions—and I make no doubt he *intends* that it shall. I am very much inclined to think the *real* character generally shows itself under the *first* movements of the mind: and if so, the former letter I sent you exhibited a very DARK picture. I do not give much credit to those instant starts of *madness* that change the better man altogether. If there *is* sense and recollection left to take up a pen, to form characters, and write the proper address, there is enough to check and regulate the mind within the bounds of decent decorum. And if there is not, wou'd any one connect themselves with *such* a Being, and ought there not to be a man with a chain and straight waistcoat always at hand? At all events, my dearest Friend, *keep quiet*, and *constantly* on your GUARD.

I think, shou'd my last have been the means of inducing you to lay the whole before Mr. Siddons,

it will have had the happiest possible consequence. When you have nothing to *conceal*, you will have much less to *fear*: and he (Mr. L.) will be robbed of a power which the slavish subjection of secrecy always gives these violent Spirits, and which they always use so ill. Their argument respecting timid minds is, "Oh! I have only to frighten them heartily, they dare not tell or complain, and will endure anything rather than *risque an éclât*." When *he knows* you have no longer anything to conceal respecting Sally, he will find that you are both in earnest—resolved, immovable; and he will naturally lose his hopes, and, with them, his *pursuit* will end.

Me he has agitated so dreadfully, that I know not when I shall recover it. My spirits were weak before, and two SUCH nights have succeeded to the receipt of his *savage* letter as I shall not soon get the better of. Nothing but scenes of gloom and images of *horror* floating on my fancy, and ever present to my sight! I am glad, however, to send you the enclosed antidote, and shall rejoice if our persecution ends here. I think no step should be taken unless he *renews* his application to Sally, and then, that you cannot act with too much decision. God bless you all! Accept our kindest wishes, and believe me ever most affectionately and faithfully yours,

P. S. P.

Mrs. Siddons' reply is interesting, as showing her already braced up to make her appearance in public, though not yet venturing to assume a part which might recall too vividly the real tragedy

she had lately passed through. At the same time she was one of those actresses who lose themselves in the part they are playing, and the effort necessary to control her own feelings rendered her acting all the more effective; a fact of which she was quite aware. "Do you not remember," writes Mrs. Piozzi to Mrs. Pennington, many years afterwards, "dear Siddons saying she never acted so well as once when her heart was heavy concerning the loss of a child?"

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

Oct^r 21st, 1798.

I am extremely anxious, dear, and best of creatures, to hear that you have recovered your tranquillity. All here is calm and quiet, God grant it may continue! for my very soul is weary of these turmoils. If our Tormentor will but cease his persecutions, we shall not only be content, but happy; for my dear, sweet Sally still assures me that it is impossible *she* should be otherwise while I am with her. And while she acknowledges (what we all feel) the powerful fascinations of this creature, she is as well aware as any of us that to be his wife would be to be *completely wretched*. I hear from Mrs. T. that he has resumed his composure, and even cheerfulness—to whom he has said, "the possession of such a woman as Sally is worth all efforts"; and he is determin'd to [deserve] her by a course of conduct worthy of her and of himself. In the first place, I *doubt* his resolution, and think Sally will have good courage if she *ever* accept him,

after what she has experienced of his character. Though she contended the other day that what *we* have seen of him *lately* has not been the *character* of the man, because it is so unlike all that we have seen of him *heretofore ourselves*, and all that we ever *heard* of him; and, I suppose (very naturally too), applies the sentiment of Sheridan's Lover upbraiding his Mistress to herself—

“ If I am mad in others' eyes,
’Tis *thou*, ’tis THOU hast made me so.”

I sometimes fear this calm precedes a storm—yet let me be thankful for this short respite! We see and feel all the wisdom, the tenderness, of your doubts and of your sollicitude about our precious Sally. You know our hearts, and I will not tire you with a repetition of protestations. My dear, lovely, lost Maria, of course, is often present to my imagination in these domestic scenes. Sweet Angel! She is happy. Yes, my belov'd Friend, my mind feels so deeply the conviction that she was not a being for *this* world, and that she left me with dispositions so well suited to the *better* part of her *existence*, that I shall be happy (I repeat it), more happy than I have been for *years*, if my darling is allowed to be at peace. But let me not expect it! “Still, still we lye within the Falcon's reach, who watches but th' unguarded hour to seize us.” My dear Mrs. T. quite adores you, yes, for yourself, quite independent of the obligation her sweet nature feels to love the creature who has so nobly encountered all the difficulties which bind you to the grateful heart of her best belov'd, for

such is the station I hold in hers. *Tell me, tell me how you are.* I am to play next Saturday. I have chosen Isabel, in "Measure for Measure," because it is a character that affords as little as possible to open wounds which are but too apt to bleed afresh. Accept all that true friendship can offer from Mr. Siddons and precious Sally to you and yours, and if you *can*, imagine how faithfully, how affectionately, I am your own

S. SIDDONS.

Our gentleman has got rid of his gratitude to *you* with his remorse for Maria, or his humiliation would have been something deeper than his last strange apology testifies. I will send you his letters soon.

Remember the bit of thread for the Ring.

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

Saturday.

My dear Soul, why do you not comfort me with the sight of your handwriting at least? I mean not to worry you, and have no fear of the diminution of your regard, for I know your nature is superior to caprice. But I long to hear that you are recovering the sad effects of all that you have suffer'd for me and mine. Oh! wou'd to God you were always by my side to assist me with your unerring wisdom, and to receive in return my unremitting gratitude, my still encreasing affection! All is still quiet. I am astonished at it, and so is Sally. He goes to the Play, and in all respects appears quite

easy. Mr. Lysons tells me that he talks of going a journey of two hundred miles for the pleasure of spending only two days with some friends in Lincolnshire ; and when Lysons urg'd the greatness of the expence and trouble for so short-liv'd a pleasure, his answer was, that, among other inducements, Miss Amelia Locke was to be of the party he was to meet. Oh! wou'd to heaven she, or any other, might divert his attentions from us! But I have no doubt this is a new experiment, and that, unless some other object *does* take possession of his mind, he will go on quietly, and by *this measure* make a powerful interest of his MODERATION. Sally seems still quite determin'd ; but when I talk'd of the importance of their *first meeting anywhere*, she told me it was impossible for her to treat him with coldness or neglect : poor thing! I feel the difficulty, yet anything short of it will, I fear, encourage him to hope that he may one day attain his end. She is not likely to meet him anywhere in private, except at Mrs. Semple's, where she assures me she will not go without me, and has promis'd that if he shou'd be at the Theatre, etc., she will seem not to see him. Her Father or myself will always, I hope, be able to accompany her on such occasions, and, by these precautions, I hope he will be tir'd of the pursuit. I wish, and so does Sally, that we had her letters out of his hands, for he may think, perhaps, their being suffer'd to remain with him is a sort of tacit encouragement ; yet, on the other hand, we sometimes think it best not to awaken the sleeping embers of those passions that may again

upon a breath, break forth to torment us. I perceive he has interested Mrs. Twiss very much, though she is convinc'd of the imprudence of Sally's listening to him ; she sees no chance of happiness with such an impetuous creature in the first place, and appears to feel that his circumstances and Sally's unfortunate constitution all combine most powerfully to operate upon a sober mind against such a connexion ; for, as to Maria's injunction (to my great surprise), she seems to say an *extorted* promise goes for nothing. This, I fear, is his opinion too. Sally does *not* think *so*, yet thinks her sister shou'd not have exacted such a promise, and that she was actuated as much by resentment for *him*, as care and tenderness for *her* in it. Of course, both Mr. and Mrs. Twiss I made acquainted with my sentiments, and they both assur'd me they saw enough of the gentleman's character (acknowledging all that was due to him, too) to hope he might never be the husband of my daughter. Mr. Twiss had insisted to hear no more upon the subject—his injunction has been obey'd, and they talk of anything else when they meet. Mrs. Twiss likewise *hears no more of it*, she tells me. Poor Sally has had another severe attack ; she has been in bed ever since Tuesday ; to-day she is better, and I hope will be well enough to come down-stairs. Oh ! my dearest Friend, shou'd she think of marrying a man more steady in his attachments than this versatile creature ? I read your charming letter. You know how I feel for the wisdom of your counsels, it is in vain for me to attempt to thank you. I must put an end to this long letter,

which wou'd have reached you sooner, but that, together with this dear creature's illness, a thousand petty cares have distracted my mind and swallow'd up my time. I suppose you will hear from Sally soon. The other day I saw Mr. Greatheed's violent letter, which Sally reprobated very much. It *is* coarsely expressed, but does not Mr. Whalley's letter to *you* (which I show'd her) breathe exactly the same sentiments in elegant terms? Dear, dear Mr. Whalley, I am all irritability now about his Play. God send all may go well with it! Remember me most kindly and all of us to your good, kind-hearted husband and your dear Mother. And dear Miss Lee, when you see her, pray tell her that I love her most sincerely, And my beloved Mrs. P., say all that you *can*, and that you *know* I feel, but indeed I cannot write. This recent loss still clouds my days and disturbs my nights. Sweet, sweet Angel!—Your own and eternally,

S. SIDDONS.

“Mr. Greatheed” at this time must have been Bertie, the son of Samuel Greatheed, the Actress's old patron, by Lady Mary Bertie, daughter of Peregrine, Duke of Ancaster. He was only a boy of twelve at the time when Mrs. Siddons was a member of the Guy's Cliffe household, but after attaining man's estate had been brought into closer relations with her by his aspirations after dramatic authorship. His blank-verse tragedy, “The Regent,” was acted at Drury Lane in 1788, the cast including Mrs. Siddons (as Dionara) and John Kemble, while the Epilogue was written by

Mrs. Piozzi. It was afterwards published with a dedication to Mrs. Siddons. That it was but an indifferent play the great actress was fully aware, and only her regard for the author's family induced her to take it up. Mrs. Kinnaird quotes a letter in which she says: "The plot of the poor young man's piece, it strikes me, is very lame, and the characters very, very ill sustained in general, but more particularly the lady, for whom the author had me in his eye. This woman is one of those monsters (I think them) of perfection, who is an Angel before her time, and is so entirely resigned to the will of Heaven, that (to a very mortal like myself) she appears to be the most provoking piece of still-life one ever had the misfortune to meet."

Mr Whalley's forthcoming play, "The Castle of Montval," a tragedy in five acts, had been published as far back as 1781, but had apparently never yet been put on the boards. Here, again, in undertaking the chief rôle specially written for her, Mrs. Siddons was evidently moved more by personal friendship for the Author than by any great admiration for his work or anticipation of its success. It ran, in fact, for eight nights only, and thus proved a worse fiasco than "The Regent," which reached twelve.

So far the true history of the artist's stormy and inconstant courtship was known only to the chief actors in the drama, and had been successfully concealed even from their nearest relatives. But the public position of Mrs. Siddons, the interest excited by her daughter's death, and her lover's unguarded words and actions, made it inevitable

that the affair should be discussed by the public, especially in fashionable places of resort. The rumours which were afloat at the Hot Wells now began to come to the ears of Mrs. Pennington, who thus writes to Mrs. Siddons and Sally to warn them of the dangers of the situation.

Mrs. PENNINGTON to Mrs. SIDDONS.

DOWRY SQUARE, 5th Novr.

MY DEAREST FRIEND,—No day passes, I may say minute, in which *you* are not present to my thoughts, and I shou'd write to you continually were it not for the fear of breaking in on your more important occupations, and of teizing you by making unreasonable demands upon your time. I love you, however, well enough to be highly gratified by your sweet and affectionate reproof on this subject, and I am truly grateful for the tender and general solicitude you express for my welfare. My nerves begin to recover something of their usual tone again, though that dear dying Angel is perpetually floating on my fancy, and my nights are not yet comfortable and undisturb'd. The *horrors*, however, which that strange and unworthy man excited in my mind (and which were much more intolerable to bear) are subsided. But I have an old complaint return'd in my stomach, the effect of any agitation, that gives me some uneasiness. A little Bath water will remove it, I trust, and set all right, which I shall have an opportunity of trying soon, if the Piozzis keep to their present intention of being there early in the next

month. Be assured I have said, and will say, all that you can desire to our belov'd friend in your name. I heard from her very lately: her letter is full of you, and human nature admits not a sentiment of warmer esteem and more perfect admiration than she at *all times* entertains for you.

And so our Darling is ill again! How I grieve for her! Dear Creature! with such a constitution, Lawrence out of the question, there is hardly a matrimonial connexion possible for her to make that would not be death to all her comfort and happiness. Her Father's house and Mother's bosom is the best asylum for her. I long to hear from the sweet girl again, for she is scarcely more interesting and precious to *your* heart than to *mine*. Her last letter to me was so clearly, calmly, and strongly expressed, and exhibited so just a mode of thinking, that it has increased my admiration of her principles and understanding almost to idolatry. After it I can have no fears of *her conduct*. But from his violence, and from his persecution (which I daresay will be renew'd, with malice and cunning adding fresh force to interest and passion), and for those waverings which you relate to me, which, in conversation on the subject, betray the power this man still has over *her heart*, and the dangerous effect of such an influence on her peace, I feel a great deal of uneasiness. We must all do as well as we can. But however feeble our resolutions may prove for the rectitude of our purposes, never let us deceive ourselves in matters of positive *right* and *wrong*: and in this respect dear Sally, *though in love*, proves a much sounder casuist than Mrs.

Twiss ; for certainly Sally's promise to her dying sister, being *voluntary*, is as binding as any human engagement CAN be. No promise can be "*extorted*" but by authority, at the peril of one's life, or some great and important forfeiture. With a pistol at y^e breast, a promise may fairly be said to be "*extorted*." But Sally was free to have *remained silent*, or to have refused her sister, whose fate was fixed ; nothing could have been a matter of disquiet to her for many hours at that time ; and if Sally chose to give her the satisfaction she required, it *was voluntarily* done on her part, and in all truth and justice she must abide the consequence, and will ever have reason to bless the impulse, which I am confident was *divine* interposition, to save an innocent and valuable creature, through the organs of that dying Angel, from *certain ruin*. It had been no object with Maria to enforce this promise till her nature became changed and absolutely purified from all earthly foibles and passions. Why, then, should *that* be imputed to her weakness and infirmity, to low resentment, and grovelling affections, from which her nature seemed, in all *other* respects, to be discharged ? It was, to me, rather a proof of the illumination she appear'd, thro' all her latter hours, to act under, and of her being sublimated above them.

I am glad Mr. T. has prohibited the subject. I wish all your near connexions would go one step farther, my belov'd friend, and *exclude the man*. It is only what ought to be done ; for, sorry am I to say, the subject has spread much more widely than we any of us suspected. Everybody's eyes will be

on you and dear Sally, and your conduct respecting this connexion closely watch'd and commented upon. While he was permitted to make his hopes and future prospects a constant subject with so near and dear a connexion as Mr. Twiss, between whom and you he must know there was so constant and unreserved an intercourse, he might well consider it as a sort of tacit encouragement; and had that continued, I do think it wou'd have been incumbent on dear Sally to have informed him, in so many plain words, through that channel, that, "whatever were his views, his hopes, or expectations, she was fully determined *never to be his*, nor was there any situation in life that she wou'd not *now* prefer to such a connexion." Whenever she has an opportunity, by any trusty friend, the very best thing she can do will be to send him *this* plain message—as he not only presumes still to retain his hopes, but to *declare* them—and then, when she meets him, take care to regulate her *deportment* accordingly.

My husband loves you all dearly, so does my good mother; they join me in every affectionate wish and sentiment to yourself, Mr. Siddons, and dear Sally.—I am your own, heart and mind,

P. S. P.

Sally's reply shows that Mr. Lawrence, though accepting his repulse by Mrs. Pennington, had not yet given up the attack, but was attempting by a flank movement to regain his coveted position within the Siddons circle. It also witnesses to the fact that those who thought they knew most were only

acquainted with a portion of the "sad story"—the unknown part, which might have altered their verdict on her conduct, being Lawrence's first infatuation for herself.

MISS SIDDONS *to* MRS. PENNINGTON.

Wednesday, Novr 7th.

I have just read your last letter to my Mother, my dear, my invaluable friend; several parts of it have given me great uneasiness—those which tell us that Mr. Lawrence's unfortunate attachment to me is more known, and even spoken of, than we had any idea: indeed, indeed I am griev'd to hear it. What is done, however, cannot be undone. Let my conduct in future prove my sorrow for pass'd errors, and clear my character from that blame which must be attach'd to it by those who know only that part of the sad history; who know that Mr. L. deserted Maria for her sister, and that *that* sister did not instantly reject him. Do but you and my dear Mother *depend upon my firmness*, DEPEND UPON IT AS FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY SOUL I SOLEMNLY ASSURE YE BOTH YOU MAY, and what have we to fear? Should this invader of our peace still persevere, will not my continued, cool, and positive rejection of all his advances assure those who, from any motive whatever, think proper to interest themselves in the affair, that there is now no intercourse between us, and that, probably, the reports of former encouragement were groundless. *I have no fears for myself*; I do not dread the sight of him; I would [not] put myself in his way, but I have no

desire to shun him. If he can imagine me so weak, so void of principle, as to suppose, after what has pass'd, that I can ever look favourably on him as a Lover again, my behaviour will be the best proof he can receive that he does not know me. If he still flatters himself with vain hopes, no one can put an end to them so effectually as myself; and that I am still, and ever shall be, resolv'd to do. But let me not proceed to such protestations: they debase me in my own eyes; I will not think that you or my Mother require them. And yet she seems to have such a dread of my meeting him or seeing him. Why, why, dear Mother, should you? Believe me resolute, trust in the unshaken truth, the firmness of your Sally—one repulse, *such as, rely on me, he shall receive*, will be sufficient for him; he *may* make a second attempt, but I do not believe he would persevere when once convinc'd of my unalterable steadiness.

I am much surpris'd that he has not written to me or to my Mother, but has rather chose to address himself to Patty Wilkinson, whom he requests to meet him. What a strange demand! If he had reflected for a moment, he must have seen the impossibility of her complying; but I do not believe he expected it, and rather look upon this as the opening to something farther. I wish it may be so. I wish him to be certain of my sentiments as soon as possible, for when once he is so, I think he will let us be at rest;—at least we shall then know *what* are his views and sentiments. I saw him for the first time last Sunday,—he was standing opposite our windows, and

looking earnestly towards them. I no sooner perceiv'd him than I instantly retired from the window, and return'd there no more. This, if he expected anything, must be some check to his expectations.

I have not yet thanked you for your charming letter, for which I had waited with much impatience. No, kindest, best of friends, I do not impute a line of your (I fear) too true delineation of his character to *pique*. All your development of the real feelings of this man coincide[s] but too exactly with the opinion I must myself at length embrace. I do not shut my eyes to conviction; *I see him as he is*. Yet, oh pardon me, if I sometimes cast over him that brilliant veil of enchantment which conceal'd his errors from our fascinated eyes—I do indeed. I cannot help viewing him sometimes as *he was*, or rather, such as he appear'd to be; and I then think that the world does not contain another creature who could so answer my idea of perfection. *But that creature was ideal!* such as my heart imagin'd it, IT NEVER EXISTED,—hard, hard task, to return to the reality! But I am now, perhaps, leading you to believe, that while I can indulge in such retrospections, while I think thus of the past, I cannot consider the present and the future *as I ought*. You see I do not conceal even *these thoughts* from you: I let you read the weakness that yet remains in my heart. But do not doubt the firmness of my mind or of my conduct,—do not so wrong me! I do not think I shall ever so love again as I have lov'd that man, but this is most certain, I LOVE HIM NO LONGER. The creature *I would have liv'd and*

died for, EXISTS NO MORE, or, as I have before said, *never did exist*. Time and circumstances have discover'd to me a character which nothing could tempt me to unite myself to. Be tranquil, dear Friend, then; I trust I have convinc'd you that I am not to be frightened by his violence, or melted by his tenderness, into a violation of my sacred promise; into a conduct contrary to the wishes of my belov'd Mother, the advice of my best friends, and to my own strong conviction and positive asseverations.

You hear I have been ill again, but now I am once more restor'd I will not waste the precious hours of life and health that are allow'd me in melancholy repinings at a misfortune I must submit to; no, let me enjoy, and be thankful for, the present! And to-night we are going to the Play. My Mother tells me she means to be very gay this Winter. I assure you I feel some little dissipation necessary to dispel the languor which my illness leaves, but my dissipation shall not exceed cheerful Society, and frequently, if I can, a Play. As to crouded assemblies, I care not if I never enter another. I rejoice to hear that those recollections, which we must a long time have in common, are becoming less painful to you. I wish my feelings with regard to that dear Girl would soften into something less distressing. For *this* I depend on time: but may her memory, and many a tender recollection, be for ever impress'd on my heart! I should hate myself if I thought I cou'd ever forget her. I look forward to the time when, I hope, we shall meet at Bath, with a chasten'd pleasure.

Adieu, most inestimable friend! Never cease to love her who is ever and most affectionately yours :

SALLY.

Remember me most kindly to your good mother and Mr. Pennington.

Sally, writing to Miss Bird on November 18, sends her, as a remembrance of Maria, a locket containing a lock of the latter's hair, with a chain made from her own, and goes on to speak of the subject which chiefly occupied her thoughts. "You ask me news, my dear friend, of one who has caus'd, and still causes us, great uneasiness. I hear from Mrs. Twiss, of whom he some time ago made a confidant, that he perseveres in thinking I cannot keep a resolution which, he imagines, was not taken from choice. Time will convince him to the contrary, since the letter which I wrote him at Birmingham, in which I most positively assur'd him there must be a total end to all intercourse between us, many events have happen'd which have render'd it quite impossible for me ever to change my determination. If he indeed loves me, I pity his present situation from my soul. But I feel certain that I shall soon share the fate of those who have gone before me, and that *he*, poor creature, will get out of this distress only to plunge himself into a new one. Well, let us only be out of the scrape, and that will be some comfort. I do assure you I should, on my own account, rejoice to hear that he had given up all thoughts of me, and was in love with Miss anybody else."

The indirect attempt to reopen negotiations had failed, and it does not appear that Lawrence made any further effort in that direction : but Mrs. Siddons, feeling that she could no longer endure the strain of facing the situation alone, adopted Mrs. Pennington's advice, and summoned up resolution to put her husband in possession of all the facts, leaving him to deal with Lawrence, should he threaten any further disturbance of their peace.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark*, LONDON, 19 Nov.]
Sunday.

MY BELOV'D FRIEND,—All is still quiet, and my precious Sally is happy, yes, I will say, happy. O, may nothing disturb the sweet calm which is the natural tendency of her equal mind, and now the gracious reward of her prudence and virtue! Last Sunday we saw the unhappy disturber of our peace at church, whose self-love was naturally wounded by our total inattention to his presence. He went to Mrs. Twiss's, and was betrayed into his usual excesses of passion. He persuades himself that Sally still loves him, and is only operated upon by some powerful influence to *appear indifferent* to him. He terrified Mrs. Twiss so completely, that both she and Mr. Twiss have told him that they shall EITHER of them quit the room at the very first mention of the subject.—Mr. Siddons, my dear Friend, is now inform'd of all; for since I was mistaken in supposing, from this interval of peace, that he, Mr. L., might in time be induc'd to desist



MRS. SIDDONS

from the pursuit of this vain shadow, I determined, last Monday morning, to hazard everything uncomfortable to myself from Mr. S.'s disapprobation, rather than leave my darling unprotected by the strong fence of a Father's care and caution. I only wish he would *write* to Sally, that he might be convinc'd, if anything can convince him, that it is possible for the terrors of *pecuniary distress*; its natural attendant, a gloomy mind; and, tho' last, not least, THE DISAPPROBATION OF FRIENDS, to resist the happiness of being *miserable* with *him*, which he, perhaps, thinks impossible.—There is a corner yet left in my heart that feels for this unhappy creature, and still yearns towards him, when I think of the hours we have all spent together under this roof,—the happiness I proposed to myself in spending the last hours of my life in the bosom of that domestic peace, which my fond imagination had pictured in his virtues and rare endowments, as the husband of my child.—Poor Creature!

I have at last, my belov'd Friend, got your Ring finish'd, and mean to send a parcel to you by the Coach to-morrow. The Gown you promis'd me to accept, I have sent made, so that you may adopt that mode, if you like it. It is worn with a white muslin Robe, made like my green silk one which you admired so, and that very long piece was fasten'd to the neck of it behind, and was sewn down the fronts. The effect is elegant and striking. There is a piece, too, to trim the Coat.

Oh my dear, dear Friend! my sweet lost Maria still floats before my swimming eyes, more lovely,

more interesting than ever! Every hour some trivial circumstance reminds me of her; and this morning, when I saw a gown of hers, well cou'd I say with poor Constance—

“Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form.”¹

This sad circumstance has really *made me ill*. Adieu, dearest, best of creatures! Imagine all kindness from hence to you and yours; and believe me encreasing in love, esteem, and gratitude, your own,
S. SIDDONS.

Sally says nothing to her friend Miss Bird as to her father's action, but writes, November 23rd:—

I am sorry to tell you that Mr. L. will not yet believe I can keep the determination I made at Birmingham, but time will, I trust, reconcile him to what at present he looks on as a loss. I grieve most sincerely for all he has, or may, suffer, but I am sure it is for the happiness of us both that all should be at an end, even if other circumstances and events had not happen'd, which render'd it as impossible for me ever to think of a union with him, *as if he were dead*. He has never address'd himself to my Mother or me since our return to Town, but he has so persecuted Mr. and Mrs. Twiss by his violence, that I fancy he has excluded himself from their house. I have not the least doubt of seeing an end of his misery concerning *me*, for,

¹ “King John,” iii. 4.

heaven is my witness, I am far from believing myself mistress of sufficient attraction to attach a being of such noted inconstancy, even if I had every inclination and opportunity to try my power:—as it is *this* passion cannot be of long duration. Good heavens! my dear girl, when we look back to this time last winter, when we think of those clandestine meetings, those various scenes of love and terror that we were witnesses to, is it not wonderful to reflect on the events which have happen'd in one short year? How much of my life pass'd tranquilly on, without one occurrence which might make me distinguish one period from another! In little more than two years, during every month, circumstances have happen'd which would almost make a history;—indeed if *ours* were known from first to last, what a *romance* it would appear.

The next letter shows that Lawrence had endeavoured by a direct appeal to Sally to reinstate himself in her favour. But the rebuff which he received was too decided, and the attempt seems to have been his last.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark, 4 Dec. 1798.*]

Sunday.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—You desir'd me to tell you how Mr. S. received the information which I told you had been communicated; with that coldness and reserve which had kept him so long

ignorant of it, and that want of an agreeing mind (*my* misfortune, though not *his fault*,) that has always check'd my tongue and chilled my heart in every occurrence of importance *thro' our lives*. No, it is not his *fault*, it is his *nature*. Nay, he wou'd never have hinted to Sally anything of the matter, if I had not earnestly represented to him how strange such reserve must appear to her; whereupon he testified his total disapprobation, nay, abhorrence, of any further intercourse with Mr. L., whom he reprobated *with the spirit of a just man* ABOVE *the* WEAKNESSES which are the misfortunes of the Race in general.

I know not what to think of his forbearing to write to Sally. Last Monday he indeed addressed a letter to both of us, by turns expressing resentment and disappointment, to beg that we would use our influence with Lysons to forbear insisting on a drawing of Sally which belongs to him (Lysons), till he had finish'd from it one for Dorothy Place, and then that he might send the original to Great Marlbro' Street. I shewed the letter to my husband, who thought it proper to speak to Lysons on the subject, and who allows the drawing to remain with him for some time at least. The letter to us ended by saying that Mrs. and Miss Siddons need be under no apprehension that this interference should encourage any presumptuous hope of further extension of their benevolence. That he shou'd view the drawing with that devotional respect with which a Lover views a lost Mistress, who had power only to destroy his peace, but leave his love uninjur'd. He is now trying, I suppose, what

moderation will do ; or does he really see the impossibility of success ? We hardly ever see him by any chance, even in the Street. We hear nothing of him, for, though he visits Mrs. Twiss, the subject is prohibited. All this while, *God be praised !* my dear child is well, and I really think is as far easy about him, as the uncertainty of his designs (which must excite a sort of restless curiosity) will allow. What will be the end of it ? I suppose, if they shou'd chance to meet, we shall have another explosion ; and all my fear is, that she shou'd be surpris'd, or frighten'd, or soften'd into some *expression* that may encourage him to *hope*, which I am *sure she does not* MEAN. But I consign her to the rectitude of her own heart, and the protection of God ! Ah ! my dear soul ! do not build too much upon our meeting at Bath. To hold two such treasures to my poor sick heart as you and my belov'd Mrs. Piozzi, would renew the story of old Æson in the person of your ever grateful and devoted

S. SIDDONS.

Accept from all here, for all with you, our very best and kindest regards. Write soon, and tell me you are *quite well*.

I open my letter to tell you that Mr. L. has written to Sally, and that she has answer'd it in so decisive a manner, that she has only to let him see she continues in the same mind, to extinguish in a short time all hope : and I fancy the sentiment of constant Love without *that*, even if it did exist, is now quite obsolete. He will pursue her to all public places, I doubt not. But she seems easy

and DECIDED. Thank God she is well, tell me that you are so too.

The next letter, from Sally, is written on the eve of an intended visit of the family to Bath, where Mrs. Pennington and the Piozzis had preceded them.

Miss SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

LONDON, *Jany. 8th*, '99.

MY DEAR Mrs. PENNINGTON,—I shall not, I hope, have above one more letter to send you before our intended Journey takes place, yet I will not be too certain, for I am still told we may not go after all. We were much griev'd by your account of Mrs. Piozzi's health, but I hope the Bath Waters will have a good effect upon her constitution, and upon yours, my dear Friend ; pray send me word it has been of service to you. We are, most of us, sad invalids at present ; my Mother, tho', to comfort us and you, is remarkably well, and stands the piercing cold of that stage most wonderfully ;—my poor Father has a dreadful cough and hoarseness ; my friend Patty Wilkinson is confin'd to her bed with a pain in her head, occasion'd by a long and obstinate cold, and I am at this moment in tortures with that same pain in my back which returns with the slightest cold ;—was it Spirits of Wine and Vinegar Dr. Nott recommended ? Tell me, dear soul, if you remember.

Ann and Harriet Lee were with us on Sunday evening ; they are both looking very well, and are



MISS CECILIA SIDDONS
1798

so gay, and so much engag'd, it is difficult to get a peep of them. Dear Mr Whalley too was here ; I hear not a word of his Play ; I cannot help wishing he would withdraw it, for it never can succeed. The new Play of "Aurelio and Miranda" is quite at an end, I fancy ; I went to see it last week, and I think I should have fall'n asleep, if our little Cecilia had not been of the party. We took her to see "Blue Beard," and she was more interesting and entertaining than you can imagine : it was quite delightful to hear and see her, and she has done nothing but act Sister Ann upon the tower, waving her handkerchief, ever since. I have great hopes that my Father will take her with us to Bath, and leave her with Miss Lee. I lament every day that she has no companions of her own age. I would not commit her to the care of Servants, and yet her extreme restlessness and high spirits are often too much for me.

My Mother is just gone to pay a round of visits, which I am happy to escape ; she desir'd me to say all that was kind for her to you, and pray remember us all with the most friendly good wishes to dear Mr. and Mrs. Piozzi, and tell him I hope he will sing some Italian duetts with me *if we do come to Bath*. Adieu, my dear Mrs Pennington ! Believe me ever your grateful and affectionate

S. M. S.

The plot of Dr. Whalley's Play ("The Castle of Montval"), previously mentioned, turned upon the immuring by the hero of his aged father in the dungeons of his own castle, that he might succeed

to his inheritance and marry the lady of his choice. The young bride discovers the prisoner during the temporary absence of her husband, who, finding them together on his return, commits suicide in an agony of shame and remorse. The part of the heroine, though written expressly for Mrs. Siddons, was a very tame one, and gave her little or no opportunity for the exercise of her great powers.

"Aurelio and Miranda" was a version by Boaden, the author of Mrs. Siddons' *Memoirs*, of "The Monk," a play by Lewis—commonly known on that account as "Monk" Lewis—and was first produced on Dec. 29, 1798. It was designed to combine the tragic and comic elements in equal and alternate sections; unfortunately the audience appear to have mistaken their cues at the commencement, and persisted in laughing and weeping at the wrong points all through the piece, which was consequently withdrawn in a few nights.

"Our little Cecilia" was Sally's youngest sister, born in 1794. Mrs. Piozzi writes the same year to Mrs. Pennington, "Mrs. Siddons' little Cecilia will, I hope, inherit her Mother's beauty; virtue will, I fancy, be quite out of fashion by the time she can possess any." Three years later she waxes enthusiastic over "the little Baby Cecilia," who "is the most extraordinary of all living Babies. Many have I seen, but none of such premature intellect,—it is a wonderful infant seriously." Her interest was no doubt increased by the fact that the child was named after her own youngest daughter Cecilia, and that she had stood sponsor to it along with Lady Percival, Dr. Whalley, and Mr. Greatheed.

She was sent, as will be seen from the letters, to the Lees' School at Bath, and in 1833 married George Coombe, Esq., Writer to the Signet, being the only one of the girls who survived her mother.

MISS SIDDONS *to* MRS. PENNINGTON.

LONDON, *Jany.* 19th [1799].

The day is at last fixed for our Journey, my dear Mrs. Pennington, and now I am quite sure it will be no longer delay'd, I hasten to tell you we shall be in Bath next Saturday or Sunday : my Father goes a few days before us, to look for lodgings, I suppose. You will not, surely, leave Bath so soon ; I hope you will remain there while we do, it will not be longer than a fortnight, I imagine. Your kind expressions of anxiety to see me are, believe me, dear and gratifying to a heart that can never cease to be impress'd with the truest sense of its obligations to you, on my own as well as on a dear Sister's account. You were very good to send to Dr. Nott about me, and I am glad to have the proper remedy by me, tho' heaven forbid I should be reduc'd to the necessity of again trying its efficacy. I rejoice to hear that dear Mrs. Piozzi receives benefit from the water ; tell her I am happy in the thoughts of seeing her, and I hope she will not only rejoice at the sight of my Mother, but feel some little pleasure in seeing her old friend Sally, her constant and warm admirer.

Harriet and Anne Lee dine with us on Monday, they will be in Bath, I fancy, about the same time

that we shall ; my friend Patty will come with us, she is a good creature, you cannot fail of liking her, —dear Dorothy is not yet return'd, nor can I tell when to expect her.

We went last night to see Mr. Holman's new Comedy ; to say that it is the best of all the new pieces we have seen is but small praise, they have been so indifferent, but this is really a good play, without Farce or Buffoonery. It was very lucky it was so, as Mrs. Holman was of our party, and if we had not approv'd, it would have been extremely unpleasant. I am going to-night to see my Mother perform " Jane Shore " ; it will probably be a long while before she plays again in that Theatre. I wonder if Mr. Sheridan has any notion that she is really at last determined to have no more to do with him. I daresay he thinks it quite impossible, but I do hope he will, for once, find himself mistaken.

I have nothing, dear Mrs. Pennington, to say upon the subject of Mr. L. ; all I can tell you is that *I am just as firmly determin'd as when I first determin'd, and that he is, I fear, still guilty of loving me too well.* Why will he not give us one more proof of his inconstancy ? But we must have patience, it cannot fail to happen soon.

My Mother desires me to say all that is kind for her to you and Mr. and Mrs. Piozzi ; you will see my Father, I should imagine, by Thursday next. Adieu, my dear Friend !—Believe me, ever yours most gratefully and affectionately, S. M. S.

Holman, whose play they had just witnessed, had been for some years on the regular staff of Covent Garden, but having quarrelled with the management, severed his connection with that theatre about this period. His comedy, "The Votary of Wealth," was produced at Covent Garden on January 9, and met with a good reception.

The part of Jane Shore in Rowe's comedy of that name had formed part of Mrs. Siddons' repertoire since 1782, the year in which she secured a permanent footing on the London stage, and was one of those in which she achieved her greatest successes.

The threatened rupture with Sheridan was the result of a breach which had been gradually widening for years. The manager of Drury Lane, in spite of many excellent qualities, was most unpunctual in the payment of his company, and even appropriated the proceeds of their benefits when pressed for money, as he seems usually to have been. Campbell quotes letters from the actress in 1796, in which she writes: "I have got no money from him yet, and all my benefit, a very great one, was swept into the Treasury, nor have I seen a shilling of it." And again, "Sheridan is certainly the greatest phenomenon that nature has produced for centuries. . . . Very few of the Actors are paid, and all are vowing to withdraw themselves, yet still we go on. Sheridan is certainly omnipotent." Two years later she has to make the same complaint. "I can get no money from the Theatre. My precious £2000 are all swallowed up in that devouring gulf, from which no

plea of right or justice can save them." On one occasion, as narrated by Mrs. Kinnaird, she actually "went on strike," and was seated at home sewing when the curtain rose for the piece in which she was due to appear. Suddenly Sheridan drove up; after a few minutes interview she succumbed to his charm, and "suffered herself to be driven to the Theatre like a lamb."

On January 23, Sally writes to tell Miss Bird of the impending journey of her family to Bath, where Mrs. Siddons was going to fulfil an engagement of the previous Autumn, cancelled on account of Maria's death, and inquires: "Have you had the promis'd visit from Mr. L.? But I rather think you have not, for I have not heard of his going so far from London. I saw him one night last week at Covent Garden Theatre, and was very much distress'd to be oblig'd to pass close by him. The Play was Mr. Holman's Comedy, 'The Votary of Wealth.' I lik'd it very much, it is a thousand times better than any of the new things I have seen this Winter. I went too, to see the new grand Spectacle at Drury Lane, 'Feudal Times,' and a very fine show it is, but the plot has no interest, nor is the music near so pretty as 'Blue Beard': it will never do what that has done . . . I have had the honour of dining in company with the Prince of Wales this Winter, and of course I am of everybody's opinion, that he is a pleasant and highly bred gentleman."

Her next letter to Miss Bird is dated from S. James' Parade, Bath, February 8, and mentions that she is just recovering from a severe attack



MRS. SIDDONS
IN "THE GRECIAN DAUGHTER"
1782

of asthma, as the result of which she is nursing herself by the fire, instead of attending her mother's Benefit. However, "We intend," she proceeds, "going to the Ball next Monday, where we should already have been, but for my unfortunate illness. I lament this deprivation the less as I understand the Balls are so crowded there is no possibility of moving, much less of dancing, and as it is the dance I love, and not the crowd, I do not on my account feel much disappointment, but Patty is fond of a bustle, and I am sorry for her. I wish'd very much to have seen my Mother in 'Zara' to-night, I attended her Toilette, and she did look so beautiful! It is a part I love to see her act extremely. I have been but to one of the Plays, that was to the 'Grecian Daughter' the first night. The people are all as mad about my Mother as if they had never seen her: it is delightfully gratifying to see their eagerness for places every night of her performance, and on the third day after our arrival here, every place was taken for this night, her Benefit.

"The two parties I have been to were both musical, at Miss Lee's. You met her and Miss Tickell somewhere last Summer; how did you like Betty's singing? I think I never heard anything so tiresome in my life. I quite wonder that Miss Lee's partiality should so pervert her taste as to make her imagine there is any musical genius about her pretty favourite. She is greatly improv'd in looks since last I saw her, but after all I had heard Miss Lee say of her, and the interest she excited in my mind before ever I saw her, I

am surprised every time I meet her to find her so every-day a character. She has none of the unaffected simplicity of youth, nor any talent or originality, that I can perceive, to compensate for the want of such a charm. To be sure she is but seventeen, but I am much deceiv'd if at seven and twenty I should alter my opinion of her."

Sally remained with her parents at Bath for about a month, enjoying the society of the Piozzis and Mrs. Pennington. In her first letter to Miss Bird after her return to Town she recurs to the subject of Miss Tickell, her antipathy being by no means lessened by distance. "You would have been astonish'd, I'm sure, to see with how much sang froid she stood up to sing one of Mr. Piozzi's Italian airs, before him and the very company that, a night or two before, had heard him sing the same song.

"I never heard of the report of Mr. L. till your letter told it me. I wish most sincerely it may be true. Whether the Lady is to be married to him, or whether her possessions are extensive, is yet a secret to me, but that there *is* a Lady who engages all his attention, and who paints extremely well, *I know*. She lives at Clapham, where he for some weeks has pass'd almost all his time. I was told, by a person who does not credit the report, that there are two sisters who both paint, and that it is merely *this talent* which attracts him. He might admire them extremely, but would never devote his whole time and attention to such *ancient artists*. If you should hear any more of this affair, do not fail to let me know, for entirely

as I have refus'd every solicitation, I can never cease to be interested in the fate of this singular being."

About the same time she writes to Mrs. Pennington, and makes allusion to the same piece of gossip.

Miss SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

LONDON, *Monday, March 5th, '99.*

MY DEAR Mrs. PENNINGTON,—I will not delay sending you the news which I am certain will be acceptable to you, that of our safe arrival in Gt. Marlborough Street: we pass'd part of Friday and Saturday at Mrs. Slack's, and on Sunday by three o'clock reach'd London. My dear Mother is, thank God, a great deal better since she has got her medicine; what a pity it was she was so long without it at Bath; I daresay she will soon completely subdue this torment. You will be happy to hear that I, too, keep well, tho' it is now a fortnight since I recover'd; I expect a visit from my constant tormentor every day now. You are by this time settled in your own house, where I hope you found good Mrs. Weston quite well; pray remember me very kindly to her. How great a loss you must feel upon leaving charming Mrs. Piozzi, who is so constantly kind and entertaining, and who loves you so well. I thought myself particularly unfortunate to be so ill while I was at Bath, but indeed I believe the situation we were in, added to the dreadful weather we had, did not agree

with me ; when next we visit Bath I hope we shall not be in S. James's Parade.

My mother hears nothing from Mr. Sheridan, who, as long as he *can* do without her, *will*, I suppose. There is a new Comedy just come out, which seems likely to prove a great favourite, so that will fill the Theatre for some time. My Mother and I have been walking out this morning (a wonderful thing in London), and have been with Mrs. John Kemble to see a new house my uncle has just taken. It is a very nice one indeed, and the back part of it quite open to fields and Gardens, and a fine prospect beyond ; they will be quite grand and gay next Winter.

You may imagine my happiness at having my friend Dorothy with me once again, and what a painful pleasure we find in talking over the past. She has never seen or heard anything from Mr. L., which I rejoice at extremely, and most heartily wish the report I hear is in the Newspapers may be true ; it says he is shortly to be married to a young Lady of distinguish'd talents, and extensive possessions. It is very certain that he spends almost all his time with a family at Clapham, where I understand there are two young Ladies, who paint extremely well.—Well I must have patience, and time will discover all ;—may he be easy and happy, and I will be content. My Mother and Father desire to be most kindly remember'd to you and Mr. Pennington. You will write to me, dear Mrs. Pennington, and ever believe me most gratefully and affectionately yours,

S. M. SIDDONS.

The torment to which Sally alludes above was probably the beginning of the *erisypelas* which at first annoyed her mother with a constant burning about the lips, and an attack of which ultimately proved fatal.

In a letter of March 23 to Miss Bird, Sally recurs to the absorbing topic of Laurence's reported engagement. "I have heard no more of Mr. L. since my return to town, but am told that he denies any *particular attraction* being the cause of his frequent visits to Clapham, and he has certainly not yet sent me the proof which I have solemnly demanded to receive whenever he is contented to think of *me* merely as a friend. If he was indeed going to be married, I think he could not deny my request, which was *that he should return me all my letters*. Tell me whenever you hear of him, for, separated as we are for ever, I must, while I have sense or feeling left, be more interested in the fate of that being than I ever was, or perhaps ever shall be, in the fate of any other."

A month later, April 29, she writes that she has "ceas'd to see, and almost to hear anything of Mr. L." ; but mentions that she sees "the Charles's frequently, they are as good and agreeable as ever, and make friendly enquiries after the *Sweet Bird*. . . . Miss Tickell is come to Town to amaze the world and win all hearts (as Miss Lee imagines), by her uncommon talents and fascinating beauty. She *is* just what she *ever was*, and I fancy, *ever will be*. I wish Miss Lee may ever see her with the same eyes she does at present, for she seems so wrapp'd up in her that it would be almost

a death-stroke to her, if she should discover the general opinion of people concerning her Favourite."

The same day she writes to Mrs. Pennington on much the same topics.

Miss SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

LONDON, *April 29th.*

[1799.]

MY DEAR MRS. PENNINGTON,—I know you will like to hear about Mr. Whalley's Tragedy, especially as I have so good an account to send you. I was at the Theatre the first night, when it went off very well, notwithstanding the little misfortunes which will always happen on a first representation. Of course, the house was filled with friends, but it made us very happy to find that, without such aid, it went off much better the second night than the first, and was announc'd, with great applause, for a third representation to-night. I am delighted that it has, even thus far, succeeded so well, and tho' it is not suppos'd that it can be a standing Play, it may go on yet several nights. My Mother really acts most divinely in it, and looks as beautiful as possible.

You will, I am sure, be sorry to hear that I have been very ill for a whole fortnight, and all by making trial of a Dr. Barton's fix'd air, or vital air, I don't know which; it disagreed so dreadfully with me that it almost kill'd me; so I have done with experiments, and will return to Laudanum. I have a thousand thanks to make you for being so good as to consult Dr. Nott about me. I really begin to

think the Pills were of service to me, and I shall continue to take them.—When shall we see anything like summer? I assure you we are sitting over Christmas fires still, and I long for warmer weather, as I flatter myself I shall keep longer well. We shall not leave London till late this Summer, if Mr. Sheridan's Play comes out, for it is to have all the attraction of splendid decoration, added to fine writing, and interesting incident: I long to see it. Mr. Sheridan told my Mother a fortnight ago that it would be ready in three weeks, but she has not yet seen her Part. Miss Lee and Betty Tickell are in Town. I believe Miss L. thinks Betty is to captivate all eyes and hearts, but she will be deceiv'd; the general impression she makes upon those I have any acquaintance with is just what *you* and *I*, and *two or three more*, could have foretold; she is not to stay now, and returns, with Miss Lee, to Bath in about a fortnight. Pray are not Mrs. Jackson and Mary Anne with you? I sent a large Frank to Mary Anne, directed to her at your house; I am rather surpris'd that she has never written to me since. My Father, Mother, and Patty desire me to say many kind things for them, and pray remember me to Mr. Pennington, and your good Mother, who continues quite well, I sincerely hope. Adieu, my dear Mrs. Pennington, believe me ever gratefully and affc^{tely} yours,

S. M. SIDDONS.

Sally's anticipations as to the fate of Dr. Whalley's play were, as we have seen before, fairly accurate. It owed what success it obtained

entirely to the acting of Mrs. Siddons as the Countess, and the author acknowledged his indebtedness by dedicating to her the second edition of it, which was issued this year.

Mrs. Siddons was not destined to see the whole of her part in "Pizarro," the new play of which Sally speaks, till the night of its actual production. According to tradition, she and her brother, John Kemble, were learning the last scenes of the last act, which Sheridan was still writing, after the piece had begun. Though the facts may be correct as far as the actors were concerned, it should be remarked that Boaden is inclined to doubt whether it was not merely done for effect on the part of Sheridan, who had really worked the parts out long before.

Sally's judgment on the new beauty did not quite coincide with that of her elders, who were, perhaps, more impartial critics. Mrs. Piozzi writes to Mrs. Pennington about the same time: "The eldest Miss Lee is grown quite young again, and three parts handsome; her protégée Miss Tickell, will, I should suppose, be greatly admired in London for a degree of beauty which (in my mind) falls rarely to the lot of a Miss, even in these days when every Miss is called beautiful."

On June 3, Sally sends Miss Bird an account of a visit of the Royal Family to Drury Lane to see "Pizarro," with which they were much pleased. The King had an enthusiastic reception, and she never felt so loyal in her life. "I wish you could see the Play," she adds, "some parts of it are very



CHARLES KEMBLE
1805

fine. My Uncle John and my Mother act divinely, and Charles has gain'd himself infinite credit in his part; you have no notion how capitally he acts, I was never more surpris'd and delighted than the first night I saw him in it, and he does look so handsome!"

She goes on to give a description of the new Beauty, Miss Jennings, whose name had evidently been coupled with that of Lawrence. The beauty she admits, but fails to find "that expression of an intelligent mind, without which all beauty is, in my eyes, defective. . . . You know I have resign'd all thoughts of Love, or Jealousy, but if I had not, I do not think Miss Jennings would make me jealous. I have once or twice seen Mr. L. by chance, and I thought I should have dropp'd the Sunday before last, in Kensington Gardens, when I passed him so close that I might have touch'd him! Whenever I meet his eyes with that glance that pierces thro' and thro' one, it is like an electric stroke to me, and it is well I had hold of Dorothy's arm. I pass'd his door too, the other day, and my heart sank within me when I pass'd the windows of that Parlour where we have pass'd so many pleasant hours! Ah, my dear friend, these are sad recollections, and such vain regrets will follow, that I always strive, and now must, to banish them from my mind."

It is evident that Sally's heart was still much at variance with her head about Lawrence, and that her feelings, however strongly repressed, from time to time got the better of her judgment, and she concludes by entreating Miss Bird to send a speedy

reply, containing all the news she hears *from a certain quarter*.

An interval of nearly six months elapses before Mrs. Siddons resumes her pen, and then her mind, though not yet free from anxiety with regard to Lawrence, is mainly filled with professional and personal details.

Mrs. SIDDONS *to* Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Franked*, LONDON, 12 Jun. 1799.]
Monday, June 11th.

By snatches must it be indeed that I write to my dear Friend, for you may imagine that playing every night a laborious part this hot weather, induces a languor, both of body and mind, not very favourable to exertion of any sort, and least of all to writing, which is at all times an *effort*,—of the truth of this let her whom we both love so entirely bear witness—our dear Mrs. Piozzi. I charge you, when *you* write to her, tell her my heart is still, and ever will remain, unchang'd towards her; yes, and I doubt not that she will still let me live in hers. Dear Mr. P. too, remember me most kindly to him. Ah! my belov'd Friend, this charming season does indeed bring still *more* forward those tender and sad images, which, God knows, need no refreshing, in my memory. I most sincerely wish you were in any other place for some months to come, dear Soul!! Oh! that you were going with me to that country which wou'd delight your fine imagination! But how it grieves me to find I have no chance of seeing you here! To-day

Mr. S. forced me out to walk in Kensington Gardens.—I was there *once before*, about this time last year, and my sweet Maria's fading image (for she was there too) haunted me at every step. Had I been at liberty to indulge the temper of my mind, I might have been the better for it, but the struggle to repress what might have been painful to my companions, defeated the end of my walk, and I came home exhausted and languid. I shall go there no more, I think. I hope your Ring will be well and quickly executed; it is in hand, and you shall have it the minute it is done. I fancy our friend Whalley will not be much the richer for his play, for *nobody is paid*. I can get no money. I rely on my Husband's good judgment, and am resolv'd not to dispute with him any more on the subject of going on with Mr. Sheridan, which, he says, is the only chance I have of getting a shilling of my money. The "Pizzarro" fills the Houses, and is likely to do so for *this* season, and part of the next. The account you have heard of it is accurate. I am now writing in my Dressing-room, while the Second Act goes on, in which I have nothing to do. And now, good-bye, for I am call'd.

After a pause of three days I begin again. Before you wrote to Sally desiring to have some silk like my strip'd Robe, I had been trying all the town over to match it, but cou'd not. You will not deny me the pleasure of sending you that, or rather, you will not wound me by returning it. I have taken an odd fancy into my head (which I believe I shall realise) of wearing nothing except

Black or White ; so do not imagine you take from me what I like to adorn my own Person with, for I try'd to match it meerly to make another sort of sleeve, in order to wear it out and have done with it. Our poor dear Sally has had a sad winter of it. I hope something, however, from the journey and change of air, and this proves that I am "a good hopper," as Dr. Johnson used to say, for 'tis to hope where *hope is almost lost!* And so you think Mr. L.'s mind is sober'd, and there's an end of the affair. I wou'd I cou'd persuade myself that it is so! And yet my fears are surely groundless, for he has been perfectly quiet now for some months. And, good God! a man *must* be out of his senses to build his happiness on the possession of a poor creature who brings such an affliction for her *portion*; for I believe her Father's mind is irrevocably fixed on that subject, if she herself were dispos'd, which I am sure she is not, to think of marrying him. I hate to think of the time when dear Patty is to leave us; she has been a greater comfort to me than I can express, and, I fear, is not going to improve her own happiness, but the thing is fix'd, and she must try. I am told the Theatre will not close till the 5th of next month. I am now comforted with the cold of this immense Theatre, but what is to become of me in December I know not, for I am on the Stage, doing almost nothing, during the whole of the First Act. God bless you and yours.

After many delays, Sheridan's much talked of patriotic melodrama, adapted from Kotzebue, had

been put on the boards on May 29, and constituted an epoch in theatrical history. Its author had grown extremely nervous about its fate, and sat in his Box all the evening in a state of unappeasable anxiety, the result of his apprehension that Mrs. Siddons, of all other people, was going to ruin his play, because she had not fallen in with his notions of the character of Elvira. It may be that she did not do what he expected with it, but she did much more—she raised the part of a camp-follower to respectability, and achieved such a success that “ Pizarro ” ran for thirty-one nights, an unprecedented occurrence at this date. But the effort required to secure and maintain this success was, as the preceding letter shows, a trying one to the great actress.

Her disinclination to write regularly, even to her dearest friends, to which she alludes, evidently grew upon her with advancing years. Mrs. Piozzi writes in 1820 to Mrs. Pennington, “ I have a sad loss in dear Conway [the actor with whom she was just then desperately smitten], and his steady resolution never to write is such a bad trick. Siddons has the same, you know, and Dr. Johnson used to complain, I remember, of David Garrick, ‘ One would believe,’ said he, ‘ that the little Dog loved me, if it was only by conversation one knew him, but “ out of sight, out of mind,” is an old proverb, and they all have so much to do.’ ”

At the close of the London season Mrs. Siddons set out for a tour in the North, playing at Edinburgh, Glasgow, York, Wakefield, Sheffield, and Hull. Her brother Stephen Kemble was at this time Manager

of the Theatre Royal at Edinburgh, with which town Sally expresses herself to Miss Bird (July 15) as "quite enchanted." "I hope," she continues, "that you are well, I was going to say happy, but tho' I am not very old, or very experienc'd, I have learnt that *happiness* is the lot of but *very* few, and that to be content is all that most of us must aspire to. My Mother told me last night of a circumstance which I must hope is true: it is that *our friend* thinks of me now ONLY AS A FRIEND. Before she left Town she wrote to him to make one more attempt for the restoration of our letters. His answer was, she tells me, that *when he married*, her letters and his *dear friend* Sally's should be return'd, but that that event he believ'd to be at a great distance; and after a great deal more, some of which was in his ambiguous style, he desires his kind remembrances to Sally, and begs my Mother to tell me they are *those of friendship*. From his late quiet behaviour I am inclin'd to think his passion is indeed expiring, yet why will he not, as I conjur'd him, confirm this idea, *and his own assertion*, by restoring me my letters? I must however be as easy as I can about them; may he be happy, and forgetting me, fix his affections *for the last time* where no obstacle will arise to his wishes. You will tell me what you hear of him, my dear girl, for from you I wish not to conceal the interest I must ever feel in all that concerns him."

By the beginning of August they had got as far south as York, where Sally was prostrated by an unusually severe attack of illness. "I believe," she writes to Miss Bird (on September 8), "I *was* in

some danger, and I certainly gave myself up for lost, and began seriously to reconcile myself to the thoughts of death. Thank God I am however once more restor'd, and freed from the great dread I have of a Consumption. It seems to me that I could resign myself without concern (comparatively) to any other death."

The date of their return to London was not yet decided, as Sheridan had not so far agreed to any settlement. Mrs. Siddons tells Mrs. Pennington on September 18: "I have just receiv'd a letter, in the usual easy style, from Mr. Sheridan, who, I fancy, thinks he has only to issue his Sublime Commands, and that they will of course be obey'd. *This* time I believe, however, he will find himself mistaken, for Sid does *at last* seem resolutely determin'd not to let me play till he has sufficient satisfaction, at least for the money which is my due; and unless something is immediately done to that end, I shall go to Doncaster to play at the Races—they begin the 24th of this month." For a short time longer he held out, and then finding, as Sally had anticipated, that it was easier to produce the money than to go on without her mother, the great actress was recalled, as appears from subsequent letters, pretty much on her own terms.

In the course of the tour a week was spent near Wakefield at the Country House of a Mr. Smyth, whom Sally describes, in a letter to Miss Bird of September 25, as "the most clever and most amiable man I ever met. . . . My Mother read a play every evening, and her audience seem'd quite deserving

of such a treat. . . . I could have enjoy'd a month there extremely."

A similar visit was paid to Nun Appleton, the Seat of Sir William Milner, but here Sally, writing October 24, anticipates not the smallest regret at leaving, "for there is no one who interests me enough to make me uneasy at parting." This, however, was not for want of celebrities, for she goes on to say: "We have had Mr. Lewis, author of 'The Monk,' here; he is clever and entertaining, but so vain a creature surely never existed, it goes beyond anything I ever met with. He chooses to be singular, and has fix'd upon a very new method, that of despising *his own works*: and 'Alonzo the Brave,' with several other beautiful things of his writing, which are admir'd by people of *the finest taste*—those people (according to Mr. Lewis) *are a set of fools for admiring*. I was quite provok'd at his arrogance, and told him very plainly that I did not believe he spoke as he felt, and that I was certain he would be extremely mortified if *those people* held his poems in such contempt as he *pretended* to hold them. If I were with you, I could entertain you for a day with telling you about him, but I won't spare him any more of my paper. Only I must tell you what bad judges people are of their own merit, and how strangely they deceive themselves. This man, whose writings bear the strongest marks of genius, affects to despise this gift of nature, and *piques himself extremely on his singing*. I wish you could hear him—he has no more ear or voice, if you'll believe me, than a croaking Raven, and makes much such a noise

when he means to sing. You may imagine what charming duetts we have had together."

Other persons besides Sally—Scott and Byron for example—found themselves extremely bored by the conversation of the member for Hindon, but it is clear that, besides some genius, much good sense and good nature were concealed under his affectations.

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

HULL, Nov^r 11th, '99.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I was in hopes to have heard from you long ere this time, and almost fear you have not receiv'd a letter which I wrote to you from Sheffield about three weeks ago. I told you I should be here at this time, and almost fear that illness has prevented your writing: pray, pray let me hear from you very soon, for indeed your silence makes me very uneasy. I shall leave this place next Saturday, and hope to reach London on Wednesday, when I shall take the first opportunity of getting your Ring. Mr. Siddons has arrang'd his affair with Sheridan, and he is all agog to bring out "Pizarro," which, he swears, shou'd not be acted without me, though the Theatre were to go to destruction; and thus have I extorted from his *Vanity* what I shou'd have expected in vain from his Justice or his Honour: but these qualities, I suppose, like the Knight's honour which Touchstone so humourously satyrises, if he ever possessed them, *he* had sworn away long before *he* saw *my* face. I know you will be glad to hear that our dear, comfortable Patty is to be with us again this

winter ; those sweet and unremitting attentions which nothing but the assiduity of true and strong affection cou'd dictate, must ever claim, from Sally and myself, the sincerest interest and deepest gratitude. She is a cheerful, sweet-natured girl. Not a word have we heard of Mr. L., but I shall not at all wonder to hear that the old sport of ogling and sighing at the Theatre had begun again. I find Sally blesses herself that she is "OUT OF THE SCRAPE," and she told me a few days ago that, if he did think proper to amuse himself in the old way, he would find himself mistaken. Poor Soul, she thought, I suppose (naturally enough for her), that his adoration was to last for ever, even against Hope, and I think is rather piqued to find that "these violent transports have violent ends." I hope to God we have nothing more to fear for him, and that he will be quiet himself, and never more disturb the peace of my poor child ! Her disorder is still regular in its attacks, and in the short intervals of ease she does, poor dear, devour pleasure with a greedy appetite ; but I fancy it will now be thought absolutely necessary to find amusement at *home*, and to avoid the night air, to which I do think she exposes herself too much in the winter. Have you seen the Whalleys and the Randolphins lately ? how do they ? and remember me to them and dear Mr. Humphries, and never forget to tell our dear, dear Piozzi how sincerely I love her. Present me most cordially to your Fireside. Write to me soon, I charge you, and believe me ever, *My belov'd Friend*, ever your grateful and affectionate

S. SIDDONS.

The Randolphs mentioned at the close of the letter were the family of Dr. F. Randolph, Canon of Bristol, and intimate friends of Mrs. Pennington. Some years afterwards the Doctor was acting as a kind of domestic chaplain to the Duke and Duchess of Kent while they were living at Amorbach, just before the birth of the Princess Victoria, and his wife wrote interesting accounts of their simple Court to Mrs. Pennington.

MISS SIDDONS *to* MRS. PENNINGTON.

LONDON, *Nov^r 24th*, '99.

MY DEAR MRS. P.,—I cannot trust even my Mother to tell you how truly sorry I was to hear of your illness. I am afraid she should mention me too slightly, and feel that a line from myself will better convince you of the sincere interest I take in your well-being than twenty messages. But you say you are recovering, and I will hope that your next letter will convey to your anxious friends the intelligence of your perfect restoration.

You know how frequent are my sufferings, I will not dwell on *them*, but tell you, what your kindness towards me assures me you will rejoice at,—I am at present perfectly well,—but more, dear friend, the glow of health, the flow of spirits granted me in these intervals, is no longer checked by tormenting regrets, by dangerous, but seducing, recollections. I seem a new creature, my mind is so at ease, that it helps me thro' confinement, and sickness has lost half its terrors. When I am well, every comfort, every enjoyment, seems doubled,

and I feel no check to my happiness, unless I perceive a cloud upon *that countenance*, whose expression regulates the degrees of my content.

Tell me, my kind friend, that you participate in my *restoration*, and it will add to my pleasures ;—but though I own myself completely cur'd of that *disease*, A TENDER PASSION—I shall never like to hear the object I once looked up to as the standard of perfection, *vilified, abus'd, execrated*. I wish him well and happy, *and rejoice that his welfare and his happiness no longer depend upon me*.

I have said enough of myself—now let me tell you of my Mother's flattering reception from a very crowded audience (tho' to the old story of Isabella), last Friday night ; they seem'd delighted to see her. I was more gratified than if this brilliant audience had been assembled to see "Pizzarro," for I felt they had now been assembled to see *my Mother*. Not a farthing of money has my Father yet touch'd, but *he* seems satisfied with his agreement, and that is enough for me. I am all impatience for Christmas, our dear little Cecy is to be with us then ; we once hop'd Miss Lee would have pass'd the holidays with us, but we are disappointed. I dare say my Mother has written, or will write to you shortly. Patty, who is come back to make us all happy, desires to be remember'd. Pray tell your good Mother and Mr. P. that I do not forget them.

Adieu, dear Mrs. P., you have my prayers for your recovery—believe me, ever your oblig'd and affect^e

S. M. S. S. S. S.

As in the previous letter where Isabella is mentioned, there is some doubt whether Shakespeare's heroine is intended, or her namesake in Southerne's "Fatal Marriage," but the latter appears the more probable. It was the play selected for her reappearance on the London stage in 1782, when it ran for twenty-two nights, and it always remained one of her most successful impersonations. Mrs. Piozzi writes to Mrs. Pennington in 1789 after seeing it at Drury Lane: "I have scarcely slept since for the strong agitation into which Southerne and Siddons together threw me last night. 'Tis an odd thing, but I never saw the old Tragedy of Isabella represented before in any place, or by any people whatever." To which her husband adds a postscript: "I can assure you last night I cried all the Tragedy: she is an enchanting woman."

Towards the close of the year Sally was looking forward to seeing Miss Bird, who was expected to pay a visit to the Lawrences in Greek Street, but she anticipates that their intercourse might be somewhat restricted, owing to her mother's suspicions. On December 15 she writes: "If my mother is not yet convinc'd that I have acted with truth and consistency, she never will be convinc'd. Even when I confess'd that my heart and my reason were at variance, I was guided by my duty; she was the confidant of all my feelings, all my resolutions. Thank Heaven I no longer have such feelings to confess, and is not Mr. L. as perfectly at ease concerning me? I know he is, and that conviction first help'd to restore me to myself. I hope, however, that my Mother will continue in her present

tranquillity respecting this subject. She has frequently said she never believ'd Mr. L. *lov'd me*; what could be the *interest* strong enough to make him so successful an hypocrite, I cannot find out. I should be tempted to think, perhaps, like her, if I had been mistress of a fortune considerable enough to tempt any man to such an extraordinary conduct; but were I to marry, I should at least have the pleasing certainty that I was courted for *myself*. I have always been told that I was to expect but little in the case of such an event, and this, I believe, was pretty well known."

Miss Bird arrived early in the new year, and though Mrs. Siddons could not bring herself to call on her at Greek Street, she gave her an interview at the Theatre, and seems, through her, to have again resumed communications with Lawrence, who was anxious to inspect some pictures at Great Marborough Street. This favour Mrs. Siddons was quite willing to grant, but shrank from an explanation with Sally. Moreover she writes to Miss Bird, February 7, 1800: "Will you be so good as to ask Mr. L. where I can get some very fine Carmine? I find it the best Rouge, cover'd with a little hair-powder; but I can get none at all equal to some he gave me about two years ago."

A personal interview soon followed, for Sally writes not long after: "I am glad my Mother has seen Mr. Lawrence, I mean, talk'd with him, as I think the composure of his manner the most likely method to convince her of his sincerity. I have not entertain'd the smallest doubt of it, but I am perhaps better able to judge in this case, as *I know*

from myself what a change may take place in one's feelings in the course of some months. . . . I continue very well, and of course in good spirits; pray come, dear Namesake, you shall hear me sing, and see me *skip*, which last accomplishment I pique myself upon exceedingly, as I have acquir'd the happy art in little more than a week. . . . Remember me to *all* the Greek Street party."

Sally's next letter, written on the eve of her friend's departure, suggests a doubt whether her cure had been as complete as she wished her friends, and perhaps herself, to believe. It shows too, that Miss Bird had not only been the channel for messages, commonplace in themselves, but dangerous under the circumstances to the peace of her friends; but that sympathy and natural love of a romance had prompted her to suggest, if not an interview, at least some less restricted means of intercourse.

"Do you," Sally writes, "like me, feel dissatisfied with our meeting this morning? When I have parted with a friend I always lament the small advantage I seem to have taken of the last moments we pass'd together. It seems to me I had many things to ask of, and to say to you, that I have neglected, but perhaps these things are best *unsaid, unheard*. . . . I have been very triste ever since you left me. In your departure I think I lose *two* instead of one. You will not be sorry that I blend your idea with one for whom you know I have so true a regard, so lively an interest. While I am writing this I cannot help cautioning you not to let it be seen, for what I have said

above, might by *some* be misconstrued, but *I trust I am writing to yourself only.*

“Who now will tell me *I am remember'd!* or say that *I do not forget?* I think I have never said as much to you before, but the idea of your being lost to me for so long a time has made me melancholy, and awaken'd feelings which it is the study of my life to stifle and extinguish. Generous girl! I admire you for the sentiments you express'd this morning, but I should not like to make trial of you at the expense of my own piece of mind. It should be my constant prayer to be *always kept at this same distance from that being, whose fascination I have not the power to escape, should I be drawn within the circle of his magic.* Time and absence have work'd wonders in me, let me then not seek to counteract their salutary effects. My heart is so restor'd, that, can I but keep clear of *that one rock*, it will, I think, split on no other. . . . Do not forget to say something *kind and friendly* for me to Mr. Lawrence;—what does he say to your proposal?”

What the proposal was does not appear, though she recurs to it in her next letter, dated March 23, 1800.

“I have never seen nor heard anything of our friend since you left Town, but perhaps you have, are you to be correspondents? I did not imagine indeed, my dear girl, that our joke was likely to be realis'd; such a proposal, as you observe, can never come from you, and indeed if it had from *him*, you would have been a bold woman to have accepted it.”

This summer Mrs. Siddons gave up her projected tour in Scotland and the North on account of the continued illness of her husband, on whose account, Sally writes (May 31), that the family were going to spend two months at Broadstairs, followed by two at Brighton. She had been twice to the Exhibition, where she "was delighted to witness the complete superiority and success of our friend."

She writes again, June 18, from Broadstairs, where she was staying with her father and grand-parents, Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kemble: "I never saw or heard anything of Mr. L. since the night of 'De Montfort,' but I hope he is well and happy, to hear that he is, will ever contribute to make me so." On July 28, she was still at Broadstairs, where her mother was acting in "Douglas" and "The Stranger," with "nobody to give her the least support."

By September 26 they had returned to Town for the Drury Lane season, and Sally mentions that "at the Play on Tuesday last I saw our Greek Street friend, looking, I thought, very pale and ill." A month later (November 27), her amour propre must have received a severe shock from Miss Lee, who, having seen Lawrence frequently, told her "he was quite well, quite gay, and she believ'd, just at present, *heart-whole*. She seem'd to think her Betty very likely to disturb his repose, but if she does—well, I will say no more, but strive to be so wise as to wonder at nothing!" Knowing Sally's opinion of Miss Betty Tickell one cannot wonder that words failed her to express her feelings.

On Christmas Eve she tells her friend, "You may have heard (and it is true) of Mr. L. being in Mrs. Kemble's Box, and with my Mother. I fancy she often sees him at the Theatre, but you have indeed been misinformed by those who told you he was ever of *our party*. All I ever see of him is now and then at the Theatre, when he just appears for a minute, as if *purposely* to make me a formal bow, and then he generally goes away, to some other part of the house, I suppose. My Mother told me the other night that he was very well and in very good spirits, which will, I sincerely hope, continue. I am less likely than any one to inform you how he spends his time. All I know of him is that he is painting, or means to paint, my Uncle as Hamlet, and that my Mother says the sketch is *very beautiful*; that he is very frequently at my Uncle's house, and I believe scarcely ever misses a night when my Mother performs, when he generally pays her a visit in her dressing room. This I hear not from my mother, for unless I force her to it, she never mentions him, but if she would give me an opportunity I would tell her something which I know would greatly please her, which is that I am now *at last myself perfectly convinc'd* that he is become *entirely indifferent* towards me. Of this change, *time* and *himself* alone could have convinc'd me." Of this, however, Mrs. Siddons required no convincing, for in the postscript of a letter of December 19 to Mrs. Pennington, she tells her that "our Knight errant is tir'd of fighting Wind-mills, and is very peaceable. He has a great deal to do, which is the best thing that can happen. I



SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE
1812

am truly glad for his own sake as well as for our own."

But this comfortable state of affairs was not to be of long duration: Sally's visit to a friend's house seems nearly to have resulted in a repetition of those violent scenes between Lawrence and Mrs. Siddons which had tried her so much two years before. The origin of the mischief is related in a letter of Sally's, dated January 23, 1801, to Miss Bird:—

It was but a day or two before I received your letter, my dear namesake, that I heard of your friend's visit to Rugby. I dare say you were all much delighted to see him, it is *not easy to forget the pleasure of such society!* and *you* may enjoy it without the dread of consequences, and the fear of displeasing those whom you wish to make happy. And so he mention'd the coldness of my salutation; believe me, my dear, he himself set the example; I could not endure to think that he should fancy me more delighted than *he wishes me to be* at the sight of him. It is very, very seldom that I *can* see him, and as I told you, *his* manner has been so cold, so repelling, that I am determined to learn the lesson he seemed to wish to teach me, and accordingly, I confess the last time I saw him, I made him as distant a Curtsy as he made me a Bow. I know my Mother sees him often, and I know she cannot cease to look upon him with the partiality she always did, and always I believe will feel for him, yet she never mentions him to me, never tells me he has spoken of me, or desires to be remembered

to me—perhaps indeed he never *does* think or speak of me—but can I ever forget the days that are past? Is it easy, is it *possible* to wish to be quite obliterated from a heart which I once thought it the extreme of happiness to possess? Ah! no, no, I feel it is not possible, and however *right* I may think it that we are separated, I would not have him *forget me!*

I know that his is an unconstant heart, that he has lov'd many, yet I think there were circumstances attending my attachment to him and his to me, which (though love be gone) should ensure me *for ever* a portion of his recollection and his tenderness. As for *my heart*, it is a single and a constant one, it never gave itself *but once* away, and I believe it *incapable* of change.

You cannot imagine how near I was meeting him in a *private party* and *without my Mother* last night at your friend Mr. Westall's. After having met him and his sister at a Lady's house twice, we liked each other so well, and they gave Patty and me so pressing an invitation to spend an evening at their house, that we could not refuse, nor had we indeed any inclination, for they are both very pleasant and good-humour'd. But when my Mother heard of this she did not like it at all, and after some time said that perhaps we were not aware how very likely it was we might meet one artist at the house of another. We had heard the Westalls speak of Mr. Lawrence and so thought this no impossible event, but it would indeed have been a most distressing one to all parties, so with my Mother's approbation Patty called upon Miss Westall and told her from some circumstances that had

happened in our family, it would be very distressing to us to meet Mr. L., and therefore if he was engaged we would wait on her some other evening. She said it was very lucky Patty had just then mention'd it, as her brother was to dine with Mr. L. that very day and had certainly intended asking him, so you see what a narrow escape we have had. What do you think would have become of us if we had met. I don't imagine he would have accepted of the invitation, if he had known *I* was to be of the party, for my Mother would have heard of it of course, and would have been so much displeased, that it would cost him some time and trouble to bring her back to her present kind dispositions towards him. I have done nothing but think all this day, that had it not been for my Mother's representations I should have found myself in company with him to-night, and then what should I have done all the evening?—I was not quite well, and tho' I tried to sing, succeeded very indifferently . . .

Indeed poor Sally's singing days were nearly over. "I sing but little now," she says, "to what I did once, and indeed I think *all* my energy is weaken'd since I have ceas'd to give delight to the three beings who were dearest to me on earth ; one is gone for ever, the second *is as dead to me*, and the third no longer takes the same delight in me she once did."

What actually occurred is not quite clear, but it is probable that Lawrence, being on intimate terms with Westall, who had at one time shared the house in Greek Street with him, came to hear

of Sally's declining the invitation, and resented it in the way she describes in her next letter, dated February 13, 1801:—

I write, my dear namesake, to tell you my grievances, and because I think by your means I may gain some information I very much wish for. I was last night at Drury Lane where I saw Mr. L—— for the first time these *many, many weeks*. Well, as soon as I thought I perceiv'd his eyes turn'd toward me, I bow'd to him; he did not return my salutation, and I supposed I had been mistaken in thinking he was looking at me. I waited a little, and then feeling sure his looks were fixed upon our Box, I bow'd *three* times, still he took not the least notice. I began to feel a little surpris'd and almost to fancy he *would* not see me; to be certain of this I took an Opera Glass, caught his eye, and immediately repeated my salutation *three times*, he actually star'd me in the face, without even once smiling, or answering me by the smallest inclination of his head. This behaviour *astonishes and grieves* me; tell me, my dear namesake (for you only can), to what I am to attribute this amazing change. I cannot believe he means to insult me—nor do I know in what I can have offended him. You can find this out—and I entreat you do. Separated for ever as we are, I would still live in his memory as a friend he esteems and regrets, and to think that he can quite forget me, and after not seeing me for so long a time behave to me as he did last night, gives me great uneasiness. Be diligent to send me an

answer. I know you sometimes write to him, ask him *from me* what I have done, for I would rather think him angry than suppose he wish'd to make me understand I was more forward than he desired I should be to acknowledge him. I need not tell you how impatient I shall be to hear from you, and do not write till you can resolve my doubts—neither you nor he can *misconstrue* my feelings. I have never ceased to express the interest I take in him, in his fortunes, in his sentiments, and I had flatter'd myself that tho' every former hope was *by both of us resign'd*, I should not in passing from his heart, be mixed with the many who had gone before and were forgotten. The kind professions of your friendship make me think you will not think any excuse necessary, and that you will not a moment delay doing what I request. I cannot now begin on any indifferent subject. So adieu, my dear girl. Believe me ever yours, sincerely and affectionately,

S. M. SIDDONS.

The request was fulfilled only too effectually, and a letter from Lawrence was forwarded to Sally, charging her with some fancied wrong, which cut her to the quick, and drew from her an indignant denial that she had ever injured him in thought, word, or deed, and an assurance that she would never more trouble him with her "ill-timed salutations"; while she announced to Miss Bird her fixed determination to omit from her letters for the future, a subject which she had resolved to banish for ever from her thoughts. Had the matter rested

here, not much harm would have been done ; but Sally, deprived of her usual confidante, was driven to express her resentment at Lawrence's conduct to her mother. Explanations followed which only complicated the situation. Mrs. Siddons believed that Sally had deceived her, and misrepresented her action to Lawrence, while she suspected Miss Bird of having broken her promise of non-interference, and of having been actively working to bring about a renewal of intercourse between Lawrence and Sally. She had an interview with Miss Bird on the subject while playing at Birmingham in the Summer, and several stormy epistles, couched in a high tragedy vein, passed between them. But at length her suspicions were allayed, she made the *amende honorable* to Miss Bird, and seeing that she was now at peace with her, with Sally, and with Lawrence, begged that silence and oblivion might rest upon it all.

Her letters to Mrs. Pennington had grown few and far between, but she writes from Birmingham, on June 2, to decline a suggested visit to Clifton :—

This is the first moment I have been mistress of, my belov'd friend, since I read your dear melancholy letter, but I made my sweet-natur'd Patty write, not only to thank you, and give you my reasons for declining yours and Mr. Pennington's kind invitation, but because I knew it wou'd comfort and amuse you to know how I was going on. I'm sure your tender nature will admit my declining so great a pleasure, since it must be dash'd with

so much pain. No, my dear Soul, my mind is, I hope, fast regaining peace once more, the waves of misery are subsiding, or I am *us'd* to buffet with them: let me take heed how the storm is again awaken'd, but let me be as near as *possible* without being absolutely resident at Clifton. I will make shift with anything to be within a walk of you. My dear Harry is with me, and how you would laugh to see him personating in turn my Son, my Lover, and my Husband; oh, how I wish you could see it, and know *him*, for he's a fine, honorable, but alas! melancholy character. He is not well indeed, and that may make him appear sad—I hope 'tis only accidental sadness. . . .

Henry, the eldest of Mrs. Siddons' children, was now about twenty-six years of age. It had been his mother's desire that he should take Holy Orders; he had been sent to Charter House, and afterwards, like his sisters, to France for his education. But the inherited dramatic instinct proved too strong, and she had to give a reluctant consent to his appearance on the stage. As may be inferred from her letter, he was now trying his prentice hand with his mother in the provinces preparatory to a winter season at Covent Garden, of which John Kemble was now Acting Manager, and whither the rest of the family followed him. Harry's success somewhat reconciled his mother to his choice of a profession. Campbell quotes a letter written by her to Mrs. Fitz Hugh in the following year, in which she says: "My son Harry's success has been a very great comfort to me. I

do think, if I can divest myself of partiality, that it is a very respectable attempt." He married in the course of this year, on which his mother remarks that though he was "a most unfortunate man in the choice of a profession," yet he was "most judicious and happy in the choice of a wife." Death cut short a promising career while he was manager of the Edinburgh Theatre in 1815, when he was but little over forty.

It is noteworthy that with the suppression of the one really absorbing topic of her letters to Miss Bird, Sally's interest in the correspondence also appears to cease: but at the close of the year (December 27) she writes to give some account of her family and surroundings. Her Uncle Charles' Play, "The Point of Honour," an adaptation from "Le Déserteur," by Mercier, in which the Author took the part of Durimel, had been acted at Drury Lane. "Charlie Moore" is as agreeable and constant as ever, and they are the best friends possible. She is enjoying, as usual, the society of her friends Patty Wilkinson and Dorothy Place; and she concludes:—

"We three all begin to think it time we should settle ourselves into the character of good quiet old maids, *and give up all the vanities of the world.* We talk in this strain at least when we are sitting round the fire together, recalling past times, and guessing at the future, but I don't know that we feel ourselves quite superannuated *at all times.* My Mother advises us to get married by all means; I tell her to have patience till the peace is concluded, for then we shall have such *trains of suitors*

that we must find *one* to our mind. . . . I think you and I are just arriv'd at the age when ladies are most difficult, in a few years we must be less fastidious, or be content to support the dreadful title of Old Maid. How do you feel about it? I am, at present, perfectly easy on the subject, but remember I don't swear always to remain so. I don't know that we grow *more reasonable* (tho' *wiser* in some respects) as we grow older, and perhaps at the age of forty, or five and forty, I may do something wonderfully absurd."

And thus, in a minor, though not altogether a melancholy strain, their correspondence closes.

About the same time, and after a silence of six months, Mrs. Siddons makes an effort to resume her correspondence.

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

[*Postmark*, 21 [Dec. ?], 1801.]
Sunday.

Alas! my dear Friend, if you cou'd guess what I had suffer'd some weeks before I wrote to you, or divine what a wretched life I have led ever since, till within this last week, how would your kind heart ache for the unkind words your letter has brought me. But I will spare you the pain of a detail of my sufferings—suffice it to say, that before I left Bannister's I was confin'd to my room for almost a Month, and with difficulty got home for better advice; since when, till last Thursday, I have been close prisoner in my own room, have suffer'd all the tortures of my last year's illness, and

have again endur'd the Surgeon's Knife. But it is past, and I am now again pretty well, I thank God! Mr. Siddons is much better, and Sally quite well. For Heaven's sake do not again judge thus rashly, nor measure my regard by the number of my letters, or the mode of their expression. You *know* what an effort it is to me to write, and under the influence of this terrible irritation for ever as I am, it were better I never wrote at all. Infirmary doth still neglect all office to which our health is bound—and why distress one's friends with complaints of grievance which must wound their feelings, without alleviation of the evil?

I am most sincerely concern'd for our poor Friend, and wish with all my Soul it were in my power to offer him any consolation; but alas! what can be offer'd but sympathising tears, in such a case? I conjure you to tell him I have given abundance of them to his sorrows, which I hold too sacred to disobey his injunction.

You will soon see our dear friends, to whom I never write, but whom I love with a tenderness and sincerity too great for me to express. Aye, and I trust they love me too—altho' I do not write to them.

Harry is unfortunate in making his debut in this singing, piping Season, but altho' he has had few opportunities of being seen, he is highly thought of by the Manager and the Public. I play'd Isabella last night, my first appearance this Season, and am to receive fifty Pounds a night, besides my Salary, till the arrears are paid—this is the agreement, it remains to say how it will

be fulfil'd. Mrs. Billington is a most surprising creature, but her talent plays only round the head, without ever touching the heart. It is time to Dress for dinner—Adieu then, my dear Friend.—Accept kind wishes and Compl^{ts} of the Season from this family and from your truly aff^{te}

S. SIDDONS.

“Bannisters,” where Mrs. Siddons had been staying, was a Country-House near Southampton, the seat of Mr. Fitz Hugh, M.P. for Tiverton. His wife was Mrs. Siddons’ most ardent friend and admirer, constantly spending the season in London to be near her, and even acting as her attendant at the Theatre. The full length portrait of Mrs. Siddons, now in the National Gallery, was painted for Mrs. Fitz Hugh by Lawrence.

“Our poor friend” is Dr. Whalley several times previously mentioned, just now overwhelmed with grief at the loss of his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Edw. Jones, Esq., and widow of John William Sherwood, a cousin of Mrs. Pennington. Though for the moment he refused to be comforted, his grief was not of very long duration, for within two years he found consolation in a Miss Heathcote. She, too, died in 1809. After a somewhat longer interval the Doctor made a third matrimonial venture, this time with a widow, Mrs. Horneck. Unfortunately for the Doctor’s peace, it was found, when too late, that she was deeply in debt, and a separation put an end to an ill-assorted union. The other “dear friends” were, of course, the Piozzis, whose interest in Mrs. Siddons never

failed, in spite of her remissness in the matter of letters.

In spite of her want of appreciation of Mrs. Billington's art, there is no doubt the latter was as supreme among English vocalists as Mrs. Siddons was among actresses. She had just returned to England after her unhappy second marriage with M. Felissent, and after an eager competition between the Managers of the rival Houses, had been engaged to appear at Covent Garden and Drury Lane alternately during the season, during which she is said to have made between £10,000 and £15,000.

For a year the correspondence ceases or is lost, and then Sally gives an account of her mother's journey to Ireland, usually a very profitable, though sometimes a trying part of her provincial Tours. Ten years before this Mrs. Piozzi writes to Mrs. Pennington: "The best thing I know is dear Siddons' return to this part of the world though for so short a time;—the worst is her setting off for Ireland in this stormy season, but it will answer to her husband and family. *She* has fame and fortune enough without running further hazards. All will go well, however, I doubt not, and if they ask why she tears herself to pieces so, she must reply with Abigail in the "Drummer,"—

"I'll clap my hand upon my purse, and tell 'em
'Twas for a thousand Pounds and Mr. Vellum."

This year she appeared, as usual, at the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley, Dublin, and in various provincial towns.

Miss SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

LONDON, Jan^y 30th, 1803.

MY DEAR MRS. PENNINGTON,—Your last letter gave me more pleasure than anything which has happen'd to me for a great while, it was so kind, and so like the letters I have formerly been us'd to receive from you. I felt very uneasy under the doubt that by some offence, unintentional on my part, I had forfeited some part of your regard. Your last kind letter has entirely reassur'd me, and I am very happy to find that your sentiments towards me are the same as I ever wish they may be. I am very glad my Mother has written to you, for tho' you know, as well as I, and indeed all her friends, how unwilling she always is to write letters, yet we none of us can reconcile ourselves to the being so long *apparently* forgotten. She does not write to me half so often as I wish she would, but there is no remedy, it is in vain to remonstrate, and I have done with it. I cannot yet name the time when we may hope to see her return; I hear the Irish have been very riotous at Limerick, where she thinks of going again soon; but I hope to heaven she will give up that plan, which may bring her the sooner home to me, who am, I assure you, sadly, sadly vexed and weary with this long absence; home wants more than half its comforts while she is away. If I could but have foreseen how much better my health was to be than it has been for many, many years, how rejoic'd should I have been to have gone with

her upon this expedition. Patty Wilkinson has no doubt been a very great comfort to her, indeed I don't know what she *could* have done without her at the time that Mrs. College chose to take herself off so abruptly. My Father and I are in daily expectation of a letter to announce to us when Mr. and Mrs. Twiss will arrive, who are coming to our House for the time they remain in London—my mother being away we can give them a Bed, but I fear Mrs. Twiss will wish she had not come: London will not appear like London to her without my mother. We want to find some person to take charge of Cecilia to Bath, but I suppose we shall have to wait till the Twiss's return. My Brother George has just obtain'd the *Writership* which my Mother has been so long making interest for: the Prince of Wales had given him a Cadetship some weeks ago, but he was at that time, and has been ever since, too ill to go to the India House to be appointed. By a lucky accident, *this Writership*, not many days ago, fell to the Prince's disposal, who immediately sent Coln^l M'Mahon to present it to George—you may imagine that we are all greatly delighted at this change, as the present emolument and future prospects of a cadet are infinitely inferior to what we may hope from his present situation.

Mr. Lysons tells me Mr. and Mrs. Piozzi are looking remarkably well, and enjoying themselves extremely at Bath. You, he said, were not there, so I will direct my letter to the Hot Wells; tho' I hope, by this time, with friends whose Society will, I am sure, more than anything else, restore you to

cheerfulness, and counterbalance the many vexations I fear you may yet have to struggle with. Do you read in the Papers of the gaiety of the Marquis of Abercorn's family at his seat *the Priory*, near London? Mrs. John Kemble is in the midst of it all, and as happy, I daresay, as any creature in the world can be—she has been there a long while, and is quite one of the family.

Let me hear from you, dear Mrs. Pennington, sometimes, tell me that you are going on more comfortably than for some time past: believe me ever most sincerely interested in all that concerns you, and ever your sincerely oblig'd and affectionate friend,

S. M. SIDDONS.

The admiration of the Prince for Mrs. Siddons was after all of some service, at any rate to her family, in procuring for her second son a post, first in the Military, and afterwards in the more profitable Civil Service of the Hon. East India Company, under whom he became Collector of the Port of Calcutta.

Though Sally does not refer to Lawrence by name she could hardly fail to be aware that he was one of the guests at Lord Abercorn's seat at Stanmore, where he took part in the private theatricals which formed the staple amusement of the party, playing Lord Rokeland in "The Wedding Day," and Grainger in "Who's the Dupe?" He had always had a leaning towards the stage, but seems to have thought that having once embarked on another branch of art, it might not be conducive to his success to indulge his taste for

acting, and, except on this occasion, seems never to have allowed himself to be persuaded into taking part in such performances.

The next and last letter of the series was indirectly occasioned by some financial difficulty in which Mrs. Pennington found herself. As she could not bring herself to ask even so intimate a friend as Mrs. Siddons for assistance, Dr. Whalley, who was interesting himself on her behalf, did so for her, though without her knowledge. Mrs. Siddons, who had not received her salary, was obliged to refer him to her husband, and as he, owing to speculations, was equally short of cash, there was some delay in procuring the sum required. Eventually, however, it was found and forwarded, and the present letter was clearly written to soothe Mrs. Pennington's pride, which had been somewhat wounded by the transaction.

Mrs. SIDDONS to Mrs. PENNINGTON.

DUBLIN, *Jan^y 31st*, 1803.

MY DEAR SOUL,—Your mind is too well known to me to have requir'd your last spirited, elegant, honorable delineation of it. I wou'd have answer'd it sooner, but have been very ill for some time with a violent cold. I am now *quite* well again, except a little remains of hoarseness. You know too well what a hurried life mine is, to need apology for this hasty, almost unintelligible, scrawl. It is not without difficulty that I steal these few moments to tell you that I am *your ever increasing in esteem and affection*

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "J. Siddons". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the final "s".

Patty joins me in love to yourself and all around you, and be well assur'd Mr. Whalley has conferred the most gratifying pleasure upon me, tho' I am sorry to have purchas'd it at the price of so much pain to your feelings.

Mrs. Siddons, attended by Patty Wilkinson, had started on this last expedition to Ireland oppressed by an unaccountable presentiment of impending misfortune, but of too vague a nature, as it would appear, to admit of distinct or consistent expression. To Campbell she wrote as if she never expected to see her friends in England again, while to Mrs. Piozzi she expressed her fears of losing her dear Father. The latter apprehension, which was only natural considering the age and failing health of Mr. Kemble, was actually realised by his death on December 9; but a severer and more unexpected blow was yet to come.

In July Sally had written from Bath to her friend Patty describing her brother Henry's wedding with Miss Murray, and seems to have been in her usual health all the winter. In a letter of February 2 she describes herself as "well and gay," and good news of her was brought by her brother George, when he came over to Ireland to take leave of his mother before proceeding to India. But on March 10, Mr. Siddons wrote to Patty Wilkinson that she was very poorly, charging her, however, not to tell Mrs. Siddons. Patty nevertheless thought it her duty to show her the letter, and Mrs. Siddons would have started at once for England, had not contrary winds rendered sailing

impossible. Only two days later her husband wrote to her to set her mind at ease, and proceed to Cork, the next place at which she was announced to play. A few more days brought another unfavourable report, and Mrs. Siddons, unable to endure the anxiety any longer, threw up all her engagements and hurried to Dublin, only to be again detained by easterly winds. When at last she succeeded in reaching England she was met on the road by a letter from her husband acknowledging Sally's serious condition, and the same day she received the news of her death, which had occurred only two hours after the letter had been written. Whatever grief the mother may have felt at Maria's death must have returned with redoubled force in the case of a daughter dearer, if possible, than Maria, for whose illness no fatal termination had been anticipated, and which had run its course too quickly to allow of any timely warning of impending danger, or even to allow her to see her child again before she died. When she had sufficiently recovered from the shock to be able to move, she retired for a time to a farmhouse near Cheltenham, with her only remaining daughter Cecilia, and Sally's friend Dorothy Place (previously mentioned in the letters), who had nursed her in her illness and been with her in her last hours.

No long time elapsed before Mrs. Siddons was doomed to suffer another bereavement by the death of her husband at Bath. The blow, though softened by long anticipation, as well as by the separation already referred to, was yet deeply felt. Mrs.



Miss (Maria) Siddons.
By Sir Thomas Lawrence.

Kinnaird quotes a letter to Mrs. Piozzi in which she writes that "there is nothing so awful as this sudden dissolution of so close a connexion, that I shall feel it longer than I shall speak of it. May I die the death of my honest, worthy husband, and may those who are dear to me remember me when I am gone as I remember him, forgetting all my errors, and recollecting only my gentleness of spirit and singleness of heart."

One more child she saw pass to the grave before her,—her eldest and best-loved son Harry, who died as previously mentioned in 1815, leaving only George and Cecilia of all her children surviving.

With Sally's death the correspondence preserved by Mrs. Pennington ceases, and of course it put a final end to Lawrence's matrimonial plans. His former intercourse with Mrs. Siddons was never renewed, yet whatever painful feelings his conduct may have excited in her mind must have passed away in her later years, when she was described by her niece as "a magnificent ruin, tottering to its fall." Not long before her death she expressed a wish that she might be borne to the grave by Lawrence and her brother Charles. The wish was unfulfilled, for she was destined to survive him, as she had done the Piozzis and most of her old friends; and it was not till June 7, 1831, that she passed away "peaceably and without suffering, and in full consciousness;" tended to the last by Cecilia and the faithful Patty Wilkinson.

Lawrence could not but have been profoundly

affected by Sally's death, and probably no one else ever quite took her place in his heart. Yet, when all necessary allowance has been made for contemporary gossip, it is clear that his manner remained as fascinating, and his emotions as easily stirred as ever. Among the names afterwards coupled with his, though without any good grounds, was that of the unhappy Princess Caroline, who had sat to him for her portrait. There are better grounds for believing that he was deeply smitten by the charms of Mrs. Wolff, the wife of the German Ambassador; and we have it on the authority of Fanny Kemble that a lady with whom she was intimately acquainted assumed widows' weeds at his death, under the conviction that had he lived he would have made her his wife. Fanny Kemble herself, partly it would seem on account of her strong resemblance to her ill-fated cousins, Sally and Maria, was one of the latest objects of his admiration, and confesses how dangerously she felt his fascination in spite of a difference of some forty years in their ages.

In marked contrast with the ill-success of the artist's love-affairs, his professional career, after the events narrated in the preceding correspondence, was one of unbroken success. The most fashionable portrait-painter of his day, his studio was thronged with aristocratic sitters. After being appointed Court-Painter at home, and commissioned to paint the chief reigning sovereigns abroad, he was knighted in 1815, and in 1820 reached the goal of his professional ambition, the Presidency of the Royal Academy. This position he filled

for some ten years, his career being closed rather suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, at the beginning of 1830. After lying in state at Somerset House he was buried in the south aisle of St. Paul's Cathedral, near Sir Christopher Wren, and separated only by West's grave from that of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Contemporary observers noted that even Lord Byron's funeral had not attracted so much public attention as that of Sir Thomas Lawrence.

It does not fall within the scope of a brief narrative of facts to make a critical estimate of the character of the impulsive and erratic genius who was the cause of so much suffering to those who loved him best, or to apportion the exact amount of blame which should be awarded to his fierce but fitful passion, the egotism and lack of self-control which marred his love and went far to wreck his life;—let us rather write over him (if we may apply the words in a somewhat different sense to that intended by the Poet),—

“Behold the man who loved and lost,
But all he was is overworn !”

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